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SALLY DOWS

PROLOGUE

THE LAST GUN AT SNAKE RIVER

What had been in the cool grey of that summer morning a dewy country lane, marked only by a few waggon tracks that never encroached upon its grassy border, and indented only by the faint footprints of a crossing fox or coon, was now, before high noon, already crushed, beaten down, and trampled out of all semblance of its former graciousness. The heavy springless jolt of gun-carriage and caisson had cut deeply through the middle track; the hoofs of crowding cavalry had struck down and shredded the wayside vines and bushes to bury them under a cloud of following dust, and the short, plunging double-quick of infantry had trodden out this hideous ruin into one dusty level chaos. Along that rudely widened

highway useless muskets, torn accoutrements, knapsacks, caps and articles of clothing were scattered, with here and there the larger wrecks of broken-down waggons, roughly thrown aside into the ditch to make way for the living current. For two hours the greater part of an Army Corps had passed and repassed that way, but, coming or going, always with faces turned eagerly towards an open slope on the right which ran parallel to the lane. And yet nothing was to be seen there. For two hours a grey and bluish cloud, rent and shaken with explosion after explosion, but always closing and thickening after each discharge, was all that had met their eyes. Nevertheless, into this ominous cloud solid moving masses of men in grey or blue had that morning melted away, or emerged from it only as scattered fragments that crept, crawled, ran or clung together in groups, to be followed and overtaken in the rolling vapour.

But for the last half-hour the desolated track had stretched empty and deserted. While there was no cessation of the rattling, crackling, and detonations on the fateful slope beyond, it had still been silent. Once or twice it had been crossed by timid, hurrying wings, and frightened and hesitating little feet, or later by skulkers and stragglers from the main column who were tempted to enter it from the hedges and bushes where they

had been creeping and hiding. Suddenly a prolonged yell from the hidden slope beyond—the nearest sound that had yet been heard from that ominous distance—sent them to cover again. It was followed by the furious galloping of horses in the lane, and a handsome, red-capped officer, accompanied by an orderly, dashed down the track, wheeled, leaped the hedge, rode out on the slope and halted. In another instant a cloud of dust came whirling down the lane after him. Out of it strained the heavy shoulders and tightened chain-traces of six frantic horses dragging the swaying gun that in this tempest of motion alone seemed passive and helpless with an awful foreknowledge of its power. As in obedience to a signal from the officer they crashed through the hedge after him, a sudden jolt threw an artilleryman from the limber before the wheel. A driver glanced back on the tense chain and hesitated. 'Go on!' yelled the prostrate man, and the wheel went over him. Another and another gun followed out of the dust cloud, until the whole battery had deployed on the slope. Before the drifting dust had fairly settled, the falling back of the panting horses with their drivers gave a momentary glimpse of the nearest gun already in position and of the four erect figures beside it. The yell that seemed to have

evoked this sudden apparition again sounded nearer; a blinding flash broke from the gun, which was instantly hidden by the closing group around it, and a deafening crash with the high ringing of metal ran down the lane. A column of white, woolly smoke arose as another flash broke beside it. This was quickly followed by another and another, with a response from the gun first fired, until the whole slope shook and thundered. And the smoke, no longer white and woolly, but darkening and thickening as with unburnt grains of gunpowder, mingled into the one ominous vapour, and driving along the lane hid even the slope from view.

The yelling had ceased, but the grinding and rattling heard through the detonation of cannon came nearer still, and suddenly there was a shower of leaves and twigs from the lower branches of a chestnut treenear the broken hedge. As the smoke thinned again a rising and falling medley of flapping hats, tossing horses' heads and shining steel appeared for an instant, advancing tumultuously up the slope. But the apparition was as instantly cloven by flame from the two nearest guns, and went down in a gush of smoke and roar of sound. So level was the delivery and so close the impact that a space seemed suddenly cleared between, in which the whirling of the shattered

remnants of the charging cavalry was distinctly seen, and the shouts and oaths of the inextricably struggling mass became plain and articulate. Then a gunner serving the nearest piece suddenly dropped his swab and seized a carbine, for out of the whirling confusion before them a single rider was seen galloping furiously towards the gun.

The red-capped young officer rode forward and knocked up the gunner's weapon with his sword. For in that rapid glance he had seen that the rider's reins were hanging loosely on the neck of his horse, who was still dashing forwards with the frantic impetus of the charge, and that the youthful figure of the rider—wearing the stripes of a lieutenant—although still erect, exercised no control over the animal. The face was boyish, blonde and ghastly; the eyes were set and glassy. It seemed as if Death itself were charging the gun.

Within a few feet of it the horse swerved before a brandished rammer, and striking the cheeks of the gun-carriage pitched his inanimate rider across the gun. The hot blood of the dead man smoked on the hotter brass with the reek of the shambles, and bespattered the hand of the gunner who still mechanically served the vent. As they lifted the dead body down the order came to 'cease firing.' For the yells from below had

ceased too ; the rattling and grinding was receding with the smoke further to the left. The ominous central cloud parted for a brief moment and showed the unexpected sun glittering down the slope upon a near and peaceful river.

THE OFFICER PICKED IT UP WITH A STRANGE FEELING

The young artillery officer had dismounted and was now gently examining the dead man. His breast had been crushed by a fragment of shell ; he must have died instantly. The same missile had cut the chain of a locket which slipped from his opened coat. The officer picked it up

with a strange feeling—perhaps because he was conscious himself of wearing a similar one; perhaps because it might give him some clue to the man's identity. It contained only the photograph of a pretty girl, a tendril of fair hair, and the word 'Sally.' In the breast-pocket was a sealed letter with the inscription, 'For Miss Sally Dows. To be delivered if I fall by the mudsill's hand.' A faint smile came over the officer's face; he was about to hand the articles to a sergeant, but changed his mind and put them in his pocket.

Meantime the lane and woods beyond, and even the slope itself, were crowding with supports and waiting troops. His own battery was still unlimbered, waiting orders. There was a slight commotion in the lane.

'Very well done, captain. Smartly taken and gallantly held.'

It was the voice of a general officer passing with his staff. There was a note of pleasant relief in its tone, and the middle-aged, care-drawn face of its owner was relaxed in a paternal smile. The young captain flushed with pleasure.

"And you seem to have had close work too,' added the general, pointing to the dead man.

The young officer hurriedly explained. The general nodded, saluted, and passed on. But a youthful *aide* airily lingered.

'The old man's feeling good, Courtland,' he said. 'We've rolled 'em up all along the line. It's all over now. In point of fact, I reckon you've fired the last round in this particular fratricidal engagement.'

The last round! Courtland remained silent, looking abstractedly at the man it had crushed and broken at his feet.

'And I shouldn't wonder if you got your gold-leaf for to-day's work. But who's your sunny Southern friend here?' he added, following his companion's eyes.

Courtland repeated his story a little more seriously, which however failed to subdue the young *aide's* levity. 'So he concluded to stop over,' he interrupted cheerfully. 'But,' looking at the letter and photograph, 'I say—look here! "Sally Dows?" Why, there was another man picked up yesterday with a letter to the same girl! Doc Murphy has it. And, by Jove! the same picture too!—eh? I say, Sally must have gathered in the boys, and raked down the whole pile! Look here, Courty! you might get Doc Murphy's letter and hunt her up when this cruel war is over Say you're "fulfilling a sacred trust!" See? Good idea, old man! Ta-ta!' and he trotted quickly after his superior.

Courtland remained with the letter and

photograph in his hand, gazing abstractedly after him. The smoke had rolled quite away from the fields on the left, but still hung heavily down the south on the heels of the flying cavalry. A long bugle call swelled up musically from below. The freed sun caught the white flags of two field-hospitals in the woods and glanced tranquilly on the broad, cypress-fringed, lazy-flowing and cruel but beautiful Southern river, which had all unseen crept so smilingly that morning through the very heart of the battle.

CHAPTER I

THE two o'clock express from Redlands to Forestville, Georgia, had been proceeding with the languid placidity of the river whose banks it skirted for more than two hours. But, unlike the river, it had stopped frequently; sometimes at recognised stations and villages, sometimes at the apparition of straw-hatted and linen-coated natives in the solitude of pine woods, where, after a decent interval of cheery conversation with the conductor and engineer, it either took the stranger on board, or relieved him of his parcel, letter, basket, or even the verbal message with which he was charged. Much of the way lay through pine-barren and swampy woods which had never been cleared or cultivated; much through decayed settlements and ruined villages that had remained unchanged since the War of the Rebellion, now three years past. There were vestiges of the severity of a former military occupation; the blackened timbers of railway bridges still unrepaired; and along the line of a certain memorable march,

sections of iron rails taken from the torn-up track, roasted in bonfires and bent while red-hot around the trunks of trees, were still to be seen. These mementoes of defeat seemed to excite neither revenge nor the energy to remove them; the dull apathy which had succeeded the days of hysterical passion and convulsion still lingered; even the slow improvement that could be detected was marked by the languor of convalescence. The helplessness of a race, hitherto dependent upon certain barbaric conditions or political place and power, unskilled in invention, and suddenly confronted with the necessity of personal labour, was visible everywhere. Eyes that but three short years before had turned vindictively to the North, now gazed wistfully to that quarter for help and direction. They scanned eagerly the faces of their energetic and prosperous neighbours—and quondam foes—upon the verandahs of Southern hotels and the decks of Southern steamboats, and were even now watching from a group in the woods the windows of the halted train, where the faces appeared of two men of manifestly different types, but still alien to the country in dress, features, and accent.

Two negroes were slowly loading the engine tender from a wood pile. The rich brown smoke of the turpentine knots was filling the train with

its stinging fragrance. The elder of the two Northern passengers, with sharp New England angles in his face, impatiently glanced at his watch.

'Of all created shiftlessness, this beats everything! Why couldn't we have taken in enough wood to last the ten miles further to the terminus when we last stopped? And why in thunder, with all this firing up, can't we go faster?'

The younger passenger, whose quiet, well-bred face seemed to indicate more discipline of character, smiled.

'If you really wish to know—and as we've only ten miles further to go—I'll show you *why*. Come with me.'

He led the way through the car to the platform and leaped down. Then he pointed significantly to the rails below them. His companion started. The metal was scaling off in thin strips from the rails, and in some places its thickness had been reduced a quarter of an inch, while in others the projecting edges were torn off, or hanging in iron shreds, so that the wheels actually ran on the narrow central strip. It seemed marvellous that the train could keep the track.

'*Now* you know why we don't go more than five miles an hour, and—are thankful that we don't,' said the young traveller quietly.

'But this is disgraceful!—criminal!' ejaculated the other nervously.

'Not at their rate of speed,' returned the younger man. 'The crime would be in going faster. And now you can understand why a good deal of the other progress in this State is obliged to go as slowly over their equally decaying and rotten foundations. You can't rush things here as we do in the North.'

The other passenger shrugged his shoulders as they remounted the platform, and the train moved on. It was not the first time that the two fellow-travellers had differed, although their mission was a common one. The elder, Mr. Cyrus Drummond, was the vice-president of a large Northern land and mill company, which had bought extensive 'tracts' of land in Georgia, and the younger, Colonel Courtland, was the consulting surveyor and engineer for the company. Drummond's opinions were a good deal affected by sectional prejudice, and a self-satisfied and righteous ignorance of the actual conditions and limitations of the people with whom he was to deal; while the younger man, who had served through the war with distinction, retained a soldier's respect and esteem for his late antagonists, with a conscientious and thoughtful observation of their character. Although he had resigned from the

army, the fact that he had previously graduated at West Point with high honours had given him preferment in this technical appointment, and his knowledge of the country and its people made him a valuable counsellor. And it was a fact that the country people had preferred this soldier with whom they had once personally grappled to the capitalist they had never known during the struggle.

The train rolled slowly through the woods, so slowly that the fragrant pine smoke from the engine still hung round the windows of the cars. Gradually the 'clearings' became larger; they saw the distant white wooden colonnades of some planter's house, looking still opulent and pretentious, although the fence of its enclosure had broken gaps, and the gate sagged on its single hinge.

Mr. Drummond sniffed at this damning record of neglect and indifference. 'Even if they were ruined, they might still have spent a few cents for nails and slates to enable them to look decent before folks, and not parade their poverty before their neighbours,' he said.

'But that's just where you misunderstand them, Drummond,' said Courtland, smiling. 'They have no reason to keep up an attitude towards their neighbours, who still know them as "Squire"

THE ARGUMENT IN THE TRAIN

So-and-so, "Colonel" this and that, and the "Judge,"—owners of their vast but crippled

estates. They are not ashamed of being poor, which is an accident.'

'But they are of working, which is *deliberation*,' interrupted Drummond. 'They are ashamed to mend their fences themselves, now that they have no slaves to do it for them.'

'I doubt very much if some of them know how to drive a nail, for the matter of that,' said Courtland, still good-humouredly, 'but that's the fault of a system older than themselves, which the founders of the Republic retained. We cannot give them experience in their new condition in one day, and in fact, Drummond, I am very much afraid that for our purposes—and I honestly believe for *their* good—we must help to keep them for the present as they are.'

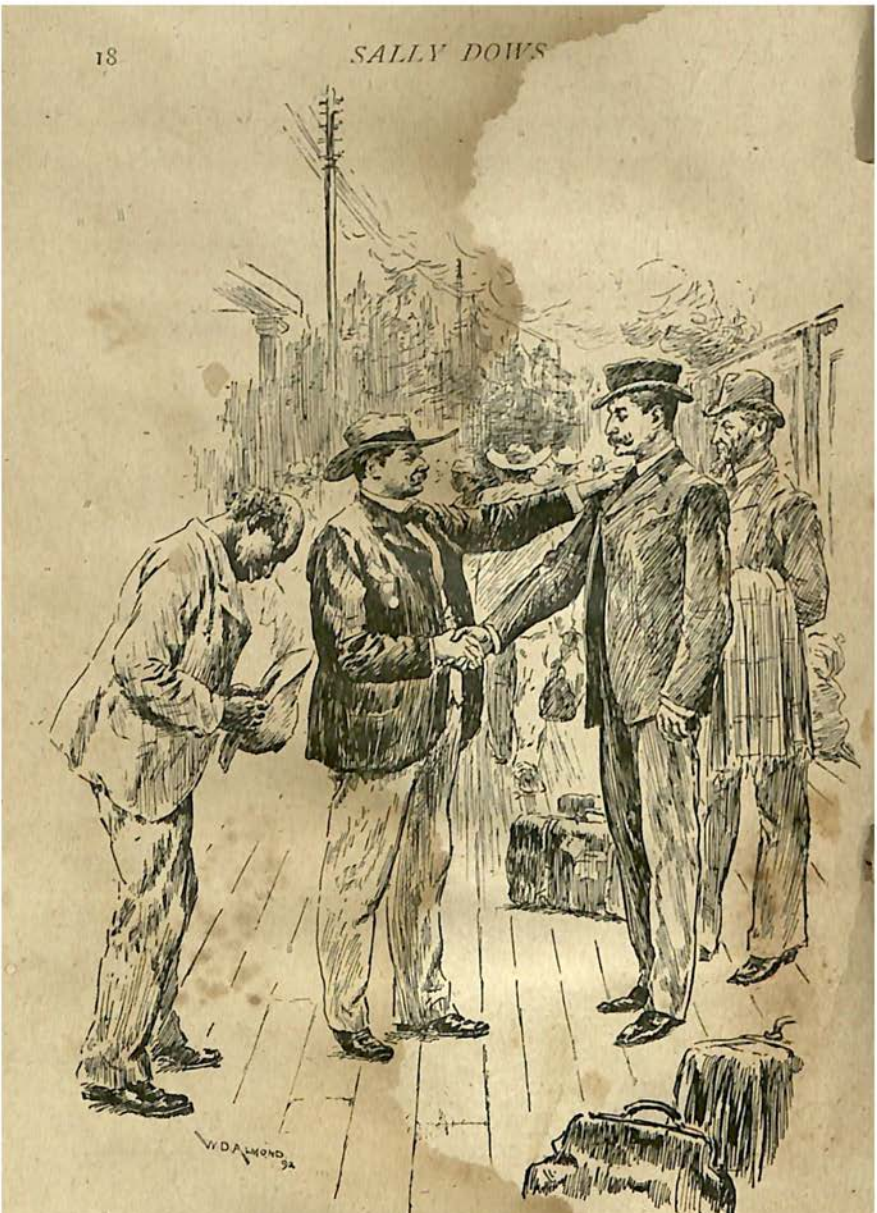
'Perhaps,' said Drummond sarcastically, 'you would like to reinstate slavery?'

'No. But I should like to reinstate the *master*. And not for *his* sake alone, but for freedom's sake and *ours*. To be plain: since I have taken up this matter for the company, I have satisfied myself from personal observation that the negro—even more than his master—cannot handle his new condition. He is accustomed to his old traditional task-master, and I doubt if he will work fairly for any other—particularly for those who don't understand him. Don't mistake

me: I don't propose to go back to the whip; to that brutal institution, the irresponsible overseer; to the buying and selling, and separation of the family, nor any of the old wrongs; but I propose to make the old master *our overseer*, and responsible to *us*. He is not a fool, and has already learned that it is more profitable to pay wages to his old slaves and have the power of dismissal, like any other employer, than be obliged, under the old system of enforced labour and life servitude, to undergo the cost of maintaining incompetence and idleness. The old sentiment of slave-owning has disappeared before natural common sense and selfishness. I am satisfied that by some such process as this utilising of the old master and the new freedom we will be better able to cultivate our lands than by buying up their estates, and setting the old owners adrift, with a little money in their pockets, as an idle, discontented class to revive old political dogmas, and foment new issues, or perhaps set up a dangerous opposition to us.'

'You don't mean to say that those infernal niggers would give the preference to their old oppressors?'

'Dollar for dollar in wages—yes! And why shouldn't they? Their old masters understand them better—and treat them generally better. They know our interest in them is only an abstract



'GLAD TO SEE YO', CUN'NEL'

sentiment, not a real liking. We show it at every turn. But we are nearing Redlands, and Major Reed will, I have no doubt, corroborate my impressions. He insists upon our staying at his house, although the poor old fellow, I imagine, can ill afford to entertain company. But he will be offended if we refuse.'

'He is a friend of yours, then?' asked Drummond.

'I fought against his division at Stony Creek,' said Courtland, grimly. 'He never tires of talking of it to me—so I suppose I am.'

A few moments later the train glided beside the Redlands platform. As the two travellers descended a hand was laid on Courtland's shoulder, and a stout figure in the blackest and shiniest of alpaca jackets, and the whitest and broadest of Panama hats, welcomed him. 'Glad to see yo', cunnel. I reckoned I'd waltz over and bring along the boy,' pointing to a grizzled negro servant of sixty who was bowing before them, 'to tote yo'r things over instead of using a hack. I haven't run much on horseflesh since the wah—ha! ha! What *I* didn't use up for remounts I reckon yo'r commissary gobbled up with the other live stock, eh?' He laughed heartily, as if the recollections were purely humorous, and again clapped Courtland on the back.

'Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Drummond, Major Reed,' said Courtland, smiling.

'Yo' were in the wah, sir?'

'No—I——' returned Drummond hesitating, he knew not why, and angry at his own embarrassment.

'Mr. Drummond, the vice-president of the company,' interposed Courtland cheerfully, 'was engaged in furnishing to us the sinews of war.'

Major Reed bowed a little more formally. 'Most of us heah, sir, were in the wah some time or other, and if you gentlemen will honah me by joining in a social glass at the hotel across the way, I'll introduce you to Captain Prendergast, who left a leg at Fair Oaks.' Drummond would have declined, but a significant pressure on his arm from Courtland changed his determination. He followed them to the hotel and into the presence of the one-legged warrior (who turned out to be the landlord and bar-keeper), to whom Courtland was hilariously introduced by Major Reed as 'the man, sir, who had pounded my division for three hours at Stony Creek!'

Major Reed's house was but a few minutes' walk down the dusty lane, and was presently heralded by the baying of three or four fox-hounds and foreshadowed by a dilapidated condition of picket-fence and stuccoed gate front.

Beyond it stretched the wooden Doric columns of the usual Southern mansion, dimly seen through the broad leaves of the horse chestnut trees that shaded it. There were the usual listless black shadows haunting the verandah and outer offices —former slaves and still attached house-servants, arrested like lizards in breathless attitudes at the approach of strange footsteps, and still holding the brush, broom, duster or home implement they had been lazily using, in their fixed hands. From the doorway of the detached

AUNT MARTHA

kitchen, connected by a gallery to the wing of the mansion, 'Aunt Martha,' the cook, gazed also, with a saucepan clasped to her bosom, and her revolving hand with the scrubbing cloth in it apparently stopped on a dead centre.

Drummond, whose gorge had risen at these evidences of hopeless incapacity and utter shiftlessness, was not relieved by the presence of Mrs. Reed—a soured, disappointed woman of forty, who still carried in her small dark eyes and thin handsome lips something of the bitterness and antagonism of the typical 'Southern rights' woman; nor of her two daughters, Octavia and Augusta, whose languid atrabiliousness seemed a part of the mourning they still wore. The optimistic gallantry and good fellowship of the Major appeared the more remarkable by contrast with his cypress-shadowed family, and their venomous possibilities. Perhaps there might have been a light vein of Southern insincerity in his good humour. 'Paw,' said Miss Octavia, with gloomy confidence to Courtland, but with a pretty curl of the hereditary lip, 'is about the only "reconstructed" one of the entire family. We don't make 'em much about yer. But I'd advise yo' friend, Mr. Drummond, if he's coming here carpet-begging, not to trust too much to paw's "reconstruction." It won't wash.' But when Courtland hastened to assure

her that Drummond was not a 'carpet-beggar,' was not only free from any of the political intrigue implied under that baleful title, but was a wealthy Northern capitalist simply seeking investment, the young lady was scarcely more hopeful. 'I suppose he reckons to pay paw for those niggers yo' stole?' she suggested with gloomy sarcasm.

'No', said Courtland, smiling; 'but what if he reckoned to pay those niggers for working for your father and him?'

'If paw is going into trading business with him; if Major Reed—a So'th'n gentleman—is going to keep shop, he ain't such a fool as to believe niggers will work when they ain't obliged to. *That's* been tried over at Mirandy Dows's, not five miles from here, and the niggers are half the time hangin' round here takin' holiday. She put up new quarters for 'em, and tried to make 'em eat together at a long table like those low-down folks up north, and did away with their cabins and their melon patches, and allowed it would get 'em out of lying round too much, and wanted 'em to work over-time and get mo' pay. And the result was that she and her niece, and a lot of poor whites, Irish and Scotch, that she had to pick up "long the river," do all the work. And her niece Sally was mo' than half Union woman

during the wah, and up to all No'th'n tricks and dodges, and swearin' by them; and yet, for all that—the thing won't work.'

'But isn't that partly the reason? Isn't her failure a great deal due to this lack of sympathy from her neighbours? Discontent is easily sown, and the negro is still weighted down by superstition; the Fifteenth Amendment did not quite knock off *all* his chains.'

'Yes, but that is nothing to *her*. For if there ever was a person in this world who reckoned she was just born to manage everything and everybody, it is Sally Dows!'

'Sally Dows!' repeated Courtland, with a slight start.

'Yes, Sally Dows, of Pineville.'

'You say she was half Union, but did she have any relations or—or—friends—in the war—on your side? Any—who—were killed in battle?'

'They were all killed, I reckon,' returned Miss Reed, darkly. 'There was her cousin, Jule Jeffcourt, shot in the cemetery with her beau, who, they say, was Sally's too; there were Chet Brooks and Joyce Masterton, who were both gone on her and both killed too; and there was old Captain Dows himself, who never lifted his head again after Richmond was taken, and drank

himself to death. It wasn't considered healthy to be Miss Sally's relations in those times, or to be even wantin' to be one.'

Colonel Courtland did not reply. The face of the dead young officer coming towards him out of the blue smoke rose as vividly as on that memorable day. The picture and letter he had taken from the dead man's breast, which he had retained ever since; the romantic and fruitless quest he had made for the fair original in after days; and the strange and fateful interest in her which had grown up in his heart since then, he now knew had only been lulled to sleep in the busy pre-occupation of the last six months, for it all came back to him with redoubled force. His present mission and its practical object, his honest zeal in its pursuit, and the cautious skill and experience he had brought to it, all seemed to be suddenly displaced by this romantic and unreal fantasy. Oddly enough it appeared now to be the only reality in his life, the rest was an incoherent, purposeless dream.

'Is — is — Miss Sally married?' he asked, collecting himself with an effort.

'Married? Yes, to that farm of her aunt's! I reckon that's the only thing she cares for.'

Courtland looked up, recovering his usual cheerful calm. 'Well, I think that after luncheon

I'll pay my respects to her family. From what you have just told me the farm is certainly an experiment worth seeing. I suppose your father will have no objection to give me a letter to Miss Dows?'

CHAPTER II

NEVERTHELESS, as Colonel Courtland rode deliberately towards Dows' Folly—as the new experiment was locally called—although he had not abated his romantic enthusiasm in the least, he was not sorry that he was able to visit it under a practical pretext. It was rather late now to seek out Miss Sally Dows with the avowed intent of bringing her a letter from an admirer who had been dead three years, and whose memory she had probably buried. Neither was it tactful to recall a sentiment which might have been a weakness of which she was ashamed. Yet, clear-headed and logical as Courtland was in his ordinary affairs, he was nevertheless not entirely free from that peculiar superstition which surrounds every man's romance. He believed there was something more than a mere coincidence in his unexpectedly finding himself in such favourable conditions for making her acquaintance.

For the rest—if there was any rest—he would simply trust to fate. And so, believing himself a cool, sagacious reasoner, but being actually, as far as Miss Dows was concerned, as blind, fatuous and unreasoning as any of her previous admirers, he rode complacently forward until he reached the lane that led to the Dows' plantation.

Here a better-kept roadway and fence, whose careful repair would have delighted Drummond, seemed to augur well for the new enterprise. Presently, even the old-fashioned local form of the fence, a slanting zigzag, gave way to the more direct line of post and rail in the Northern fashion. Beyond it presently appeared a long low frontage of modern buildings which, to Courtland's surprise, were entirely new in structure and design. There was no reminiscence of the usual Southern porticoed gable or columned verandah. Yet it was not Northern either. The factory-like outline of façade was partly hidden in Cherokee rose and jessamine.

A long roofed gallery connected the buildings and became a verandah to one. A broad, well rolled gravel drive led from the open gate to the newest building, which seemed to be the office; a smaller path diverged from it to the corner house, which, despite its severe simplicity, had a more residential appearance. Unlike Reed's house

there were no lounging servants or field hands to be seen; they were evidently attending to their respective duties. Dismounting, Courtland tied his horse to a post at the office door and took the smaller path to the corner house.

The door was open to the fragrant afternoon breeze wafted through the rose and jessamine. So also was a side door opening from the hall into a long parlour or sitting room that ran the whole width of the house. Courtland entered it. It was prettily furnished, but everything had the air of freshness and of being uncharacteristically new. It was empty, but a faint hammering was audible on the rear wall of the house, through the two open French windows at the back, curtained with trailing vines, which gave upon a sunlit courtyard. Courtland walked to the window. Just before it, on the ground, stood a small light ladder, which he gently put aside to gain a better view of the courtyard as he put on his hat, and stepped out of the open window.

In this attitude he suddenly felt his hat tipped from his head, followed almost instantaneously by a falling slipper, and the distinct impression of a very small foot on the crown of his head. An indescribable sensation passed over him. He hurriedly stepped back into the room, just as a small striped-stockinged foot was as hastily drawn

up above the top of the window with the feminine exclamation, 'Good gracious me!'

Lingering for an instant, only to assure himself that the fair speaker had secured her foothold and was in no danger of falling, Courtland snatched up his hat, which had providentially fallen inside the room, and retreated ingloriously to the other end of the parlour. The voice came again from the window, and struck him as being very sweet and clear:

'Sophy, is that *you*?'

Courtland discreetly retired to the hall. To his great relief a voice from the outside answered: 'Whar, Miss Sally?'

'What did you move the ladder for? Yo' might have killed me.'

'Fo' God, Miss Sally, I didn't move no ladder!'

'Don't tell me, but go down and get my slipper. And bring up some more nails.'

Courtland waited silently in the hall. In a few moments he heard a heavy footstep outside the rear window. This was his opportunity. Re-entering the parlour somewhat ostentatiously, he confronted a tall negro girl who was passing through the room carrying a tiny slipper in her hand. 'Excuse me,' he said politely, 'but I could not find any one to announce me. Is Miss Dows at home?'

The girl instantly whipped the slipper behind her. 'Is yo' wanting Miss Mirandy Dows,' she asked with great dignity, 'oah Miss Sally Dows—her niece? Miss Mirandy's bin gone to Atalanta for a week.'

'I have a letter for Miss Miranda, but I shall be very glad if Miss Sally Dows will receive me,' returned Courtland, handing the letter and his card to the girl.

She received it with a still greater access of dignity and marked deliberation. 'It's clean gone outer my mind, sah, ef Miss Sally is in de resumption of visitahs at dis houah. In fac', sah,' she continued, with intensified gravity and an exaggeration of thoughtfulness as the sounds of Miss Sally's hammering came shamelessly from the wall, 'I doahn know exac'ly ef she's engaged playin' de harp, practisin' de languages, or paintin' in oil and watah colours, o' givin' audiences to offishals from de Court House. It might be de houah for de one or de odder. But I'll communicate wid her, sah, in the budwoh on de uppah flo'.' She backed dexterously, so as to keep the slipper behind her, but with no diminution of dignity, out of a side door. In another moment the hammering ceased, followed by the sound of rapid whispering without; a few tiny twigs and leaves slowly rustled to the ground, and then

there was complete silence. He ventured to walk to the fateful window again.

SHE RECEIVED IT WITH A STILL GREATER ACCESS OF DIGNITY

Presently he heard a faint rustle at the other end of the room, and he turned. A sudden

tremulousness swept along his pulses, and then they seemed to pause; he drew a deep breath that was almost a sigh, and remained motionless.

He had no preconceived idea of falling in love with Miss Sally at first sight, nor had he dreamed such a thing possible. Even the girlish face that he had seen in the locket, although it had stirred him with a singular emotion, had not suggested that. And the ideal he had evolved from it was never a potent presence. But the exquisitely pretty face and figure before him, although it might have been painted from his own fancy of her, was still something more and something unexpected. All that had gone before had never prepared him for the beautiful girl who now stood there. It was a poor explanation to say that Miss Sally was four or five years older than her picture, and that later experiences, enlarged capacity, a different life, and new ambition had impressed her youthful face with a refined mobility; it was a weird fancy to imagine that the blood of those who had died for her had in some vague, mysterious way imparted an actual fascination to her, and he dismissed it. But even the most familiar spectator, like Sophy, could see that Miss Sally had the softest pink complexion, the silkiest hair, that looked as the floss of the Indian corn might

look if curled, or golden spider threads if materialised, and eyes that were in bright grey harmony with both; that the frock of India muslin, albeit home made, fitted her figure perfectly—from the azure bows on her shoulders to the ribbon around her waist—and that the hem of its billowy skirt showed a foot which had the reputation of being the smallest foot south of Mason and Dixon's Line![1] But it was something more intangible than this which kept Courtland breathless and silent.

'I'm not Miss Miranda Dows,' said the vision with a frankness that was half childlike and half practical, as she extended a little hand, 'but I can talk "fahm" with yo' about as well as aunty, and I reckon from what Major Reed says heah,' holding up the letter between her fingers, 'as long as yo' get the persimmons yo' don't mind what kind o' pole yo' knock 'em down with.'

The voice that carried this speech was so fresh, clear and sweet that I am afraid Courtland thought little of its bluntness or its conventional transgressions. But it brought him his own tongue quite unemotionally and quietly. 'I don't know what was in that note, Miss Dows, but I can

[1] The old boundary line between the free State of Pennsylvania and the Slave States of Maryland and Virginia—run by two English surveyors in 1763 and 1767, afterwards a theme and catchword of political controversy.

hardly believe that Major Reed ever put my present felicity quite in that way.'

Miss Sally laughed. Then with a charming exaggeration she waved her little hand towards the sofa.

'There! Yo' naturally wanted a little room for that, co'nnle, but now that yo've got it off—and mighty pooty it was too—yo' can sit down. And with that she sank down at one end of the sofa, prettily drew aside a white billow of skirt so as to leave ample room for Courtland at the other, and clasping her fingers over her knees, looked demurely expectant.

'But let me hope that I am not disturbing you unseasonably,' said Courtland, catching sight of the fateful little slipper beneath her skirt, and remembering the window. 'I was so preoccupied in thinking of your aunt as the business manager of these estates that I quite forgot that she might have a lady's hours for receiving.'

'We haven't got any company hours,' said Miss Sally, 'and we haven't just now any servants for company manners, for we're short-handed in the fields and barns. When yo' came I was nailing up the laths for the vines outside because we couldn't spare carpenters from the factory. But,' she added, with a faint accession of mischief in her voice, 'yo' came to talk about the fahm?'

'Yes,' said Courtland rising, 'but not to interrupt the work on it. Will you let me help you nail up the laths on the wall? I have some experience that way, and we can talk as we work. Do oblige me!'

The young girl looked at him brightly.

'Well, now, there's nothing mean about *that*. Yo' mean it for sure?'

'Perfectly. I shall feel so much less as if I was enjoying your company under false pretences.'

'Yo' just wait here, then.'

She jumped from the sofa, ran out of the room, and returned presently, tying the strings of a long striped cotton blouse—evidently an extra one of Sophy's—behind her back as she returned. It was gathered under her oval chin by a tape also tied behind her, while her fair hair was tucked under the usual red bandana handkerchief of the negro housemaid. It is scarcely necessary to add that the effect was bewitching.

'But,' said Miss Sally, eyeing her guest's smartly-fitting frock-coat, 'yo'll spoil yo'r pooty clothes, sure! Take off yo'r coat—don't mind me—and work in yo'r shirt sleeves.'

Courtland obediently flung aside his coat and followed his active hostess through the French window to the platform outside. Above them a wooden ledge or cornice, projecting several inches,

ran the whole length of the building. It was on this that Miss Sally had evidently found a foot-

TYING THE STRINGS OF A LONG STRIPED COTTON BLOUSE

hold while she was nailing up a trellis work of laths between it and the windows of the second floor. Courtland found the ladder, mounted to

the ledge, followed by the young girl, who smilingly waived his proffered hand to help her up, and the two gravely set to work. But in the intervals of hammering and tying up the vines Miss Sally's tongue was not idle. Her talk was as fresh, as quaint, as original as herself, and yet so practical and to the purpose of Courtland's visit, as to excuse his delight in it and her own fascinating propinquity. Whether she stopped to take a nail from between her pretty lips when she spoke to him, or whether holding on perilously with one hand to the trellis while she gesticulated with the hammer, pointing out the divisions of the plantation from her coign of vantage, he thought she was as clear and convincing to his intellect as she was distracting to his senses.

She told him how the war had broken up their old home in Pineville, sending her father to serve in the Confederate councils of Richmond, and leaving her aunt and herself to manage the property alone; how the estate had been devastated, the house destroyed, and how they had barely time to remove a few valuables; how, although *she* had always been opposed to secession, and the war, she had not gone north, preferring to stay with her people, and take with them the punishment of the folly she had foreseen. How after the war and her father's death, she and her aunt had

determined to 'reconstruct *themselves*' after their own fashion on this bit of property, which had survived their fortunes because it had always been considered valueless and unprofitable for negro labour. How at first they had undergone serious difficulty, through the incompetence and ignorance of the freed labourer, and the equal apathy and prejudice of their neighbours. How they had gradually succeeded with the adoption of new methods and ideas, that she herself had conceived, which she now briefly and clearly stated. Courtland listened with a new, breathless, and almost superstitious interest: they were *his own theories*—perfected and demonstrated!

'But you must have had capital for this?'

'Ah, yes! that was where they were fortunate. There were some French cousins with whom she had once stayed in Paris, who advanced enough to stock the estate. There were some English friends of her father's, old blockade runners—who had taken shares, provided them with more capital and imported some skilled labourers, and a kind of steward or agent to represent them. But they were getting on, and perhaps it was better for their reputation with their neighbours that they had not been *beholden* to the "No'th." Seeing a cloud pass over Courtland's face, the young lady added with an affected sigh, and the

first touch of feminine coquetry which had invaded their wholesome *camaraderie:*

'Yo' ought to have found us out *before*, co'nnle.'

For an impulsive moment, Courtland felt like telling her then and there the story of his romantic quest; but the reflection that they were standing on a narrow ledge with no room for the emotions, and that Miss Sally had just put a nail in her mouth and a start might be dangerous, checked him. To this may be added a new jealousy of her previous experiences, which he had not felt before. Nevertheless he managed to say with some effusion:

'But I hope we are not too late *now*. I think my principals are quite ready and able to buy up any English or French investor now or to come.'

'Yo' might try yo' hand on that one,' said Miss Sally, pointing to a young fellow who had just emerged from the office and was crossing the courtyard. 'He's the English agent.'

He was square shouldered and round headed, fresh and clean looking in his white flannels, but with an air of being utterly distinct and alien to everything around him, and mentally and morally irreconcilable to it. As he passed the house he glanced shyly at it; his eye brightened and his manner became self-conscious as he caught sight

of the young girl, but changed again when he saw her companion. Courtland likewise was conscious of a certain uneasiness; it was one thing to be helping Miss Sally *alone*, but certainly another thing to be doing so under the eye of a stranger; and I am afraid that he met the stony observation of the Englishman with an equally cold stare. Miss Sally alone retained her languid ease and self-possession. She called out: 'Wait a moment, Mr. Champney,' slipped lightly down the ladder, and leaning against it with one foot on its lowest rung awaited his approach.

'I reckoned yo' might be passing by,' she said, as he came forward. 'Co'nnle Courtland,' with an explanatory wave of the hammer towards her companion, who remained erect and slightly stiffened on the cornice, 'is no relation to those figures along the frieze of the Redlands' Court House, but a No'th'n officer, a friend of Major Reed's, who's come down here to look after So'th'n property for some No'th'n capitalists. Mr. Champney,' she continued, turning and lifting her eyes to Courtland as she indicated Champney with her hammer, 'when he isn't talking English, seeing English, thinking English, dressing English, and wondering why God didn't make everything English, is trying to do the same for *his* folks. Mr. Champney, Co'nnle Courtland.

Co'nnle Courtland, Mr. Champney!' The two men bowed formally. 'And now, Co'nnle, if yo'll come down, Mr. Champney will show yo' round the fahm. When yo've got through yo'll find me here at work.'

Courtland would have preferred, and half-looked for her company and commentary on this round of inspection, but he concealed his disappointment and descended. It did not exactly please him that Champney seemed relieved, and appeared to accept him as a *bonâ fide* stranger who could not possibly interfere with any confidential relations that he might have with Miss Sally. Nevertheless he met the Englishman's offer to accompany him with polite gratitude, and they left the house together.

In less than an hour they returned. It had not even taken that time for Courtland to discover that the real improvements and the new methods had originated with Miss Sally; that she was virtually the controlling influence there, and that she was probably retarded rather than assisted by the old-fashioned and traditional conservatism of the company of which Champney was steward. It was equally plain, however, that the young fellow was dimly conscious of this, and was frankly communicative about it.

'You see, over there they work things in a

different way, and, by Jove! they can't understand that there is any other, don't you know? They're always wigging me as if I could help it, although I've tried to explain the nigger business, and all that, don't you know? They want Miss Dows to refer her plans to me, and expect me to report on them, and then they'll submit them to the Board and wait for its decision. Fancy Miss Dows doing that! But, by Jove! they can't conceive of her *at all* over there, don't you know?'

'Which Miss Dows do you mean?' asked Courtland drily.

'Miss Sally, of course,' said the young fellow briskly. '*She* manages everything—her aunt included. She can make those niggers work when no one else can, a word or smile from her is enough. She can make terms with dealers and contractors—her own terms too—when they won't look at *my* figures. By Jove! she even gets points out of those travelling agents and inventors, don't you know, who come along the road with patents and samples. She got one of those lightning-rod and wire fence men to show her how to put up an arbour for her trailing roses. Why, when I first saw *you* up on the cornice, I thought you were some other chap that she'd asked—don't you know—that is, at first, of course!—you know

what I mean—ha, by Jove!—before we were introduced, don't you know.'

'I think I *offered* to help Miss Dows,' said Courtland, with a quickness that he at once regretted.

'So did *he*, don't you know? Miss Sally does not *ask* anybody. Don't you see? a fellow don't like to stand by and see a young lady like her doing such work.' Vaguely aware of some infelicity in his speech, he awkwardly turned the subject, 'I don't think I shall stay here long, myself.'

'You expect to return to England?' asked Courtland.

'Oh, no! But I shall go out of the company's service and try my own hand. There's a good bit of land about three miles from here that's in the market, and I think I could make something out of it. A fellow ought to settle down and be his own master,' he answered tentatively, 'eh?'

'But how will Miss Dows be able to spare you?' asked Courtland, uneasily conscious that he was assuming an indifference.

'Oh, I'm not much use to her, don't you know—at least not *here*. But I might, if I had my own land and if we were neighbours. I told you *she* runs the place, no matter who's here, or whose money is invested.'

'I presume you are speaking now of young Miss Dows?' said Courtland drily.

'Miss Sally — of course — always,' said Champney simply. 'She runs the shop.'

'Were there not some French investors—relations of Miss Dows? Does anybody represent *them*?' asked Courtland pointedly.

Yet he was not quite prepared for the naïve change in his companion's face. 'No. There was a sort of French cousin who used to be a good deal to the fore, don't you know? But I rather fancy he didn't come here to look after the *property*,' returned Champney with a quick laugh. 'I think the aunt must have written to his friends, for they "called him off," and I don't think Miss Sally broke her heart about him. She's not that sort of girl—eh?" She could have her pick of the State if she went in for that sort of thing—eh?'

Although this was exactly what Courtland was thinking, it pleased him to answer in a distrait sort of fashion, 'Certainly, I should think so,' and to relapse into an apparently business abstraction.

'I think I won't go in,' continued Champney as they neared the house again. 'I suppose you'll have something more to say to Miss Dows. If there's anything else you want of *me*, come to the office. But *she'll* know. And—er—er—if

you're—er—staying long in this part of the country, ride over and look me up, don't you know? and have a smoke and a julep; I have a boy who knows how to mix them, and I've some old brandy sent me from the other side. Good-bye.'

More awkward in his kindliness than in his simple business confidences, but apparently equally honest in both, he shook Courtland's hand and walked away. Courtland turned towards the house. He had seen the farm and its improvements; he had found some of his own ideas practically discounted; clearly there was nothing left for him to do but to thank his hostess and take his leave. But he felt far more uneasy than when he had arrived; and there was a singular sense of incompleteness in his visit that he could not entirely account for. His conversation with Champney had complicated—he knew not why—his previous theories of Miss Dows, and although he was half conscious that this had nothing to do with the business that brought him there, he tried to think that it had. If Miss Sally was really—a—a—distracting element to contiguous man, it was certainly something to be considered in a matter of business of which she would take a managerial part. It was true that Champney had said she was 'not that sort of girl,' but this was the testimony of one who was clearly under her

influence. He entered the house through the open French window. The parlour was deserted. He walked through the front hall and porch; no one was there. He lingered a few moments, a slight chagrin beginning to mingle with his uneasiness. She might have been on the look-out for him. She or Sophy must have seen him returning. He would ring for Sophy, and leave his thanks and regrets for her mistress. He looked for a bell, touched it, but on being confronted with Sophy, changed his mind and asked to *see* Miss Dows. In the interval between her departure and the appearance of Miss Sally he resolved to do the very thing which he had dismissed from his thoughts but an hour before as ill-timed and doubtful. He had the photograph and letter in his pocket; he would make them his excuse for personally taking leave of her.

She entered with her fair eyebrows lifted in a pretty surprise.

'I declare to goodness, I thought yo'd ridden over to the red barn and gone home from there. I got through my work on the vines earlier than I thought. One of Judge Garret's nephews dropped in in time to help me with the last row. Yo' needn't have troubled yo'self to send up for me for mere company manners, but Sophy says yo' looked sort of "anxious and particular" when

yo' asked for me—so I suppose yo' want to see me for something.'

Mentally objurgating Sophy, and with an unpleasant impression in his mind of the unknown neighbour who had been helping Miss Sally in his place, he nevertheless tried to collect himself gallantly.

'I don't know what my expression conveyed to Sophy,' he said, with a smile, 'but I trust that what I have to tell you may be interesting enough to make you forget my second intrusion.' He paused, and still smiling, continued: 'For more than three years, Miss Dows, you have more or less occupied my thoughts; and although we have actually met to-day only for the first time, I have during that time carried your image with me constantly. Even this meeting, which was only the result of an accident, I had been seeking for three years. I find you here under your own peaceful vine and fig-tree, and yet three years ago you came to me out of the thunder-cloud of battle.'

'My good gracious!' said Miss Sally.

She had been clasping her knee with her linked fingers, but separated them and leaned backward on the sofa with affected consternation, but an expression of growing amusement in her bright eyes. Courtland saw the mistake of his tone, but it was too late to change it now. He handed her the

locket and the letter, and briefly, and perhaps a little more seriously, recounted the incident that had put him in possession of them. But he entirely suppressed the more dramatic and ghastly details, and his own superstition and strange presentiment possession towards her.

Miss Sally took the articles without a tremor, or the least deepening or paling of the delicate faint suffusion of her cheek. When she had glanced over the letter, which appeared to be brief, she said, with smiling, half-pitying tranquillity:

'Yes!—it *was* that poor Chet Brooks, sure! I heard that he was killed at Snake River. It was just like him to rush in and get killed the first pop! And all for nothing too—pure foolishness!'

Shocked, yet relieved, but uneasy under both sensations, Courtland went on blindly:

'But he was not the only one, Miss Dows. There was another man picked up who also had your picture.'

'Yes—Joyce Masterton. They sent it to me. But you didn't kill *him* too?'

'I don't know that I personally killed either,' he said, a little coldly. He paused, and continued with a gravity which he could not help feeling very inconsistent and even ludicrous: 'They were brave men, Miss Dows.'

'To have worn my picture?' said Miss Sally, brightly.

'To have *thought* they had so much to live for, and yet to have willingly laid down their lives for what they believed was right.'

'Yo' didn't go huntin' me for three years to tell *me*, a So'th'n girl, that So'th'n men know how to fight, did yo', co'nnle?' returned the young lady, with the slightest lifting of her head and drooping of her blue veined lids in a divine hauteur. 'They were always ready enough for that, even among themselves. It was much easier for these pooah boys to fight a thing out, than think it out, or work it out. Yo' folks in the No'th learned to do all three; that's where you got the grip on us. Yo' look surprised, co'nnle?'

'I didn't expect you would look at it—quite in—in—that way,' said Courtland, awkwardly.

'I am sorry I disappointed yo' after yo'd taken such a heap o' trouble,' returned the young lady, with a puzzling assumption of humility as she rose, and smoothed out her skirts, 'but I couldn't know exactly what yo' might be expecting after three years; if I *had*, I might have put on mo'ning.' She stopped and adjusted a straying tendril of her hair with the sharp corner of the dead man's letter. 'But I thank yo', all the same, co'nnle. It was real good in yo' to think of toting these

SHE REMOVED HER LITTLE SLIPPER FROM HER FOOT

things over here.' And she held out her hand frankly.

Courtland took it with the sickening consciousness that for the last five minutes he had been an unconscionable ass. He could not prolong the interview, after she had so significantly risen. If he had only taken his leave and kept the letter and locket for a later visit, perhaps when they were older friends! It was too late now. He bent over her hand for a moment, again thanked her for her courtesy, and withdrew. A moment later she heard the receding beat of his horse's hoofs on the road.

She opened the drawer of a brass-handled cabinet, and after a moment's critical survey of her picture in the dead man's locket, tossed it and the letter in the recesses of the drawer. Then she stopped, removed her little slipper from her foot, looked at *that* too, thoughtfully, and called 'Sophy!'

'Miss Sally?' said the girl, reappearing at the door.

'Are you sure you did not move that ladder?'

'I 'clare to goodness, Miss Sally, I never teched it?'

Miss Sally directed a critical glance at her handmaiden's red coifed head. 'No,' she said to herself softly, 'it felt nicer than wool, anyway!'

CHAPTER III

In spite of the awkward termination of his visit—or perhaps *because* of it—Courtland called again at the plantation within the week. But this time he was accompanied by Drummond, and was received by Miss Miranda Dows, a tall, aquiline-nosed spinster of fifty, whose old-time politeness had become slightly affected, and whose old beliefs had given way to a half cynical acceptance of new facts. Mr. Drummond, delighted with the farm and its management, was no less fascinated by Miss Sally, while Courtland was now discreet enough to divide his attentions between her and her aunt, with the result that he was far from participating in Champney's conviction of Miss Miranda's unimportance. To the freedmen she still represented the old implacable task-mistress, and it was evident that they superstitiously believed that she still retained a vague power of over-riding the Fourteenth Amendment at her pleasure, and was only to be restrained by the mediation of the good-humoured and sensible Miss Sally. Courtland was quick to see the value of this influence in the transition state of the freedmen, and pointed it out to his principal. Drum-

mond's previous doubts and scepticism, already weakened by Miss Sally's fascinations, vanished entirely at this prospect of beneficially utilising these lingering evils of slavery. He was convinced, he was even enthusiastic. The foreign investors were men to be bought out; the estate improved and enlarged by the company, and the fair owners retained in the management and control. Like most prejudiced men, Drummond's conversion was sudden and extreme, and, being a practical man, was at once acted upon. At a second and third interview the preliminaries were arranged, and in three weeks from Courtland's first visit, the Dows' plantation and part of Major Reed's were merged in the 'Drummond Syndicate,' and placed beyond financial uncertainty. Courtland remained to represent the company as superintendent at Redlands, and with the transfer of the English investments Champney retired, as he had suggested, to a smaller venture of his own, on a plantation a few miles distant which the company had been unable to secure.

During this interval Courtland had frequent interviews with Miss Sally, and easy and unrestrained access to her presence. He had never again erred on the side of romance or emotion; he had never again referred to the infelix letter and photograph; and, without being obliged to confine

himself strictly to business affairs, he had maintained an even, quiet, neighbourly intercourse with her. Much of this was the result of his own self-control and soldierly training, and gave little indication of the deeper feeling that he was conscious lay beneath it. At times he caught the young girl's eyes fixed upon him with a mischievous curiosity. A strange thrill went through him; there are few situations so subtle and dangerous as the accidental confidences and understandings of two young people of opposite sex, even though the question of any sentimental inclination be still in abeyance. Courtland knew that Miss Sally remembered the too serious attitude he had taken towards her past. She might laugh at it, and even resent it, but she *knew* it, remembered it, knew that *he* did, and this precious knowledge was confined to themselves. It was in their minds when there was a pause in their more practical and conventional conversation, and was even revealed in the excessive care which Miss Sally later took to avert at the right moment her mischievously smiling eyes. Once she went further. Courtland had just finished explaining to her a plan for substituting small farm buildings for the usual half-cultivated garden-patches dear to the negro field hand, and had laid down the drawings on

the table in the office, when the young lady, leaning against it with her hands behind her, fixed her bright grey eyes on his serious face.

FIXED HER BRIGHT GREY EYES ON HIS SERIOUS FACE

'I vow and protest, co'nnle,' she said, dropping into one of the quaint survivals of an old-time

phraseology, peculiar to her people, 'I never allowed yo' could just give yo'self up to business, soul and body, as yo' do, when I first met yo' that day.'

'Why, what did you think me?' he asked quickly.

Miss Sally, who had a Southern aptitude for gesture, took one little hand from behind her, twirled it above her head with a pretty air of disposing of some airy nothing in a presumably masculine fashion, and said: 'Oh, *that*.'

'I am afraid I did not impress you then as a very practical man,' he said, with a faint colour.

'I thought you roosted rather high, co'nnle, to pick up many worms in the mo'ning. But,' she added with a dazzling smile, 'I reckon from what yo' said about the photograph, yo' thought *I* wasn't exactly what yo' believed I ought to be either.'

He would have liked to tell her then and there that he would have been content if those bright beautiful eyes had never kindled with anything but love or womanly aspiration; that that soft, lazy, caressing voice had never been lifted beyond the fire-side or domestic circle; that the sunny, tendrilled hair and pink ears had never inclined to anything but whispered admiration; and that the graceful, lithe, erect figure, so inde-

pendent and self-contained, had been satisfied to lean only upon his arm for support. He was conscious that this had been in his mind when he first saw her; he was equally conscious that she was more bewilderingly fascinating to him in her present inaccessible intelligence and practicality.

'I confess,' he said, looking into her eyes with a vague smile, 'I did not expect you would be so forgetful of some one who had evidently cared for you.'

'Meaning Mr. Chet Brooks, or Mr. Joyce Masterton, or both. That's like most yo' men, co'nnle. Yo' reckon because a girl pleases you she ought to be grateful all her life—and yo'rs too! Yo' think different now! But yo' needn't act up to it quite so much.' She made a little deprecating gesture with her disengaged hand as if to ward off any retaliating gallantry. 'I ain't speaking for myself, co'nnle. Yo' and me are good enough friends. But the girls round here think yo're a trifle too much taken up with rice and niggers. And looking at it even in yo'r light, co'nnle, it ain't *business*. Yo' want to keep straight with Major Reed, so it would be just as well to square the Major's woman folks. Tavy and Gussie Reed ain't exactly poisonous, co'nnle, and yo' might see one or the other home from church next Sunday. The Sunday after that,

just to show yo' ain't particular, and that yo' go in for being a regular beau, yo' might walk home with *me*. Don't be frightened—I've got a better gown than this. It's a new one, just come home from Louisville, and I'll wear it for the occasion.'

He did not dare to say that the quaint frock she was then wearing—a plain 'checked' household gingham used for children's pinafores, with its ribbons of the same pattern, gathered in bows at the smart apron pockets, had become a part of her beauty, for he was already hopelessly conscious that she was lovely in anything, and he might be impelled to say so. He thanked her gravely and earnestly, but without gallantry or effusion, and had the satisfaction of seeing the mischief in her eyes increase in proportion to his seriousness, and heard her say with affected concern: 'Bear up, co'nnle! Don't let it worry yo' till the time comes,' and took his leave.

On the following Sunday he was present at the Redlands Episcopal Church, and after the service stood with outward composure but some inward chafing among the gallant youth who, after the local fashion, had ranged themselves outside the doors of the building. He was somewhat surprised to find Mr. Champney, evidently as much out of place as himself, but less self-contained, waiting in the crowd of expectant

cavaliers. Although convinced that the young Englishman had come only to see Miss Sally, he was glad to share his awkward isolation with another stranger, and greeted him pleasantly. The Dows' pew being nearer to the entrance than the Reeds' gave up its occupants first. Colonel Courtland lifted his hat to Miss Miranda and her niece, at the same moment that Champney moved forward and ranged himself beside them. Miss Sally catching Courtland's eye showed the whites of her own in a backward glance of mischievous significance to indicate the following Reeds. When they approached, Courtland joined them, and finding himself beside Miss Octavia entered into conversation. Apparently the suppressed passion and sardonic melancholy of that dark-eyed young lady spurred him to a lighter, gayer humour even in proportion as Miss Sally's good-natured levity and sunny practicality always made him serious. They presently fell to the rear with other couples and were soon quite alone.

A little haughty, but tall and erect in her well-preserved black grenadine dress, which gave her the appearance of a youthful but implacable widow, Miss Reed declared she had not seen the co'nnle for 'a coon's age,' and certainly had not expected to have the honour of his company as long as there were niggers to be elevated or

painted to look like white men. She hoped that he and paw and Sally Dows were happy! They hadn't yet got so far as to put up a nigger preacher in the place of Mr. Symes, their rector, but she understood that there was some talk of running Hannibal Johnson—Miss Dows' coachman—for county judge next year! No! she had not heard that the co'nnle *himself* had thought of running for the office! He might laugh at her as much as he liked—he seemed to be in better spirits than when she first saw him—only she would like to know if it was 'No'th'n style' to laugh coming home from church? Of course if it *was* she would have to adopt it with the Fourteenth Amendment. But, just now, she noticed the folks were staring at them, and Miss Sally Dows had turned round to look. Nevertheless, Miss Octavia's sallow cheek nearest the Colonel —the sunny side—had taken a faint brunette's flush, and the corners of her proud mouth were slightly lifted.

'But, candidly, Miss Reed, don't you think that you would prefer to have old Hannibal, whom you know, as county judge, than a stranger and a Northern man like *me*?'

Miss Reed's dark eyes glanced sideways at the handsome face and elegant figure beside her. Something like a saucy smile struggled to her thin lips.

'There mightn't be much to choose, co'nnle.'

'I admit it. We should both acknowledge our mistress, and be like wax in her hands.'

'Yo' ought to make that pooty speech to Sally Dows, she's generally mistress around here. But,' she added, suddenly fixing her eyes on him, 'how does it happen that yo' ain't walking with her instead of that Englishman? Yo' know that it's as plain as day that he took that land over there just to be near her, when he was no longer agent.'

But Courtland was always master of himself and quite at ease regarding Miss Sally when not in that lady's presence. 'You forget,' he said smilingly, 'that I'm still a stranger and know little of the local gossip; and if I did know it, I am afraid we didn't bargain to buy up with the *land* Mr. Champney's personal interest in the *landlady*.'

'Yo'ld have had your hands full, for I reckon she's pooty heavily mortgaged in that fashion, already,' returned Miss Reed with more *badinage* than spitefulness in the suggestion. 'And Mr. Champney was run pooty close by a French cousin of hers when he was here. Yo' haven't got any French books to lend me, co'nnle—have yo'? Paw says you read a heap of French, and I find it mighty hard to keep up *my* practice since I left the Convent at St. Louis, for paw don't know what

sort of books to order, and I reckon he makes awful mistakes sometimes.'

The conversation here turning upon polite literature, it appeared that Miss Octavia's French reading, through a shy, proud innocence and an imperfect knowledge of the wicked subtleties of the language, was somewhat broad and unconventional for a young lady. Courtland promised to send her some books, and even ventured to suggest some American and English novels not intensely 'No'th'n' nor 'metaphysical'—according to the accepted Southern beliefs. A new respect and pitying interest in this sullen, solitary girl, cramped by tradition, and bruised rather than enlightened by sad experiences, came over him. He found himself talking quite confidentially to the lifted head, arched eyebrows, and aquiline nose beside him, and even thinking what a handsome high bred *brother* she might have been to some one. When they had reached the house, in compliance with the familiar custom, he sat down on one of the lower steps of the verandah, while she, shaking out her skirt, took a seat a step or two above him. This enabled him, after the languid local fashion, to lean on his elbow and gaze up into the eyes of the young lady, while she with equal languor looked down upon him. But in the present instance Miss Reed leaned forward suddenly, and

'YO MEAN TO SAY, THERE'S NOTHING BETWEEN YO' AND SALLY DOWS?

darting a sharp quick glance into his very consciousness, said:

'And yo' mean to say, co'nnle, there's nothing between yo' and Sally Dows?'

Courtland neither flushed, trembled, grew confused, nor prevaricated.

'We are good friends, I think,' he replied quietly, without evasion or hesitation.

Miss Reed looked at him thoughtfully. 'I reckon that is so—and no more. And that's why yo've been so lucky in everything,' she said slowly.

'I don't think I quite understand,' returned Courtland, smiling. 'Is this a paradox—or a consolation?'

'It's the *truth*,' said Miss Reed, gravely. 'Those who try to be anything more to Sally Dows lose their luck.'

'That is—are rejected by her. Is she really so relentless?' continued Courtland, gaily.

'I mean that they lose their luck in everything. Something is sure to happen. And *she* can't help it either.'

'Is this a Sibylline warning, Miss Reed?'

'No. It's nigger superstition. It came from Mammy Judy, Sally's old nurse. It's part of their regular Hoo doo.[1] She bewitched Miss Sally

[1] *I.e.* Negro witchcraft; from 'Voo-doo,' probably.

when she was a baby, so that everybody is bound to *her* as long as they care for her, and she isn't bound to *them* in any way. All their luck goes to her as soon as the spell is on them,' she added darkly.

'I think I know the rest,' returned Courtland with still greater solemnity. 'You gather the buds of the witch hazel in April when the moon is full. You then pluck three hairs from the young lady's right eyebrow when she isn't looking——'

'Yo' can laugh, co'nnle, for yo're lucky—because yo're free.'

'I'm not so sure of that,' he said gallantly, 'for I ought to be riding at this moment over to the Infirmary to visit my Sunday sick. If being made to pleasantly forget one's time and duty is a sign of witchcraft I am afraid Mammy Judy's enchantments were not confined to only one Southern young lady.'

The sound of quick footsteps on the gravel path caused them both to look up. A surly-looking young fellow, ostentatiously booted and spurred, and carrying a heavy raw hide riding-whip in his swinging hand, was approaching them. Deliberately, yet with uneasy self-consciousness, ignoring the presence of Courtland, he nodded abruptly to Miss Reed, ascended the steps, brushed

past them both without pausing, and entered the house.

'Is that yo'r manners, Mr. Tom?' called the young lady after him, a slight flush rising to her sallow cheek. The young man muttered something from the hall which Courtland did not catch. 'It's Cousin Tom Higbee,' she explained half disdainfully. 'He's had some ugliness with his horse, I reckon, but paw ought to teach him how to behave. And—I don't think he likes No'th'n men,' she added gravely.

Courtland, who had kept his temper with his full understanding of the intruder's meaning, smiled as he took Miss Reed's hand in parting. 'That's quite enough explanation, and I don't know why it shouldn't be even an apology.'

Yet the incident left little impression on him as he strolled back to Redlands. It was not the first time he had tasted the dregs of former sectional hatred in incivility and discourtesy, but as it seldom came from his old personal antagonists—the soldiers—and was confined to the callow youth, previous non-combatants and politicians, he could afford to overlook it. He did not see Miss Sally during the following week.

CHAPTER IV

ON the next Sunday he was early at church. But he had perhaps accented the occasion by driving there in a light buggy behind a fast thoroughbred, possibly selected more to the taste of a smart cavalry officer than an agricultural superintendent. He was already in a side pew, his eyes dreamily fixed on the prayer-book ledge before him, when there was a rustle at the church door, and a thrill of curiosity and admiration passed over the expectant congregation. It was the entrance of the Dows party, Miss Sally well to the fore. She was in her new clothes, the latest fashion in Louisville, the latest but two in Paris and New York.

It was over twenty years ago. I shall not imperil the effect of that lovely vision by recalling to the eye of to-day a fashion of yesterday. Enough, that it enabled her to set her sweet face and vapoury golden hair in a horseshoe frame of delicate flowers, and to lift her oval chin out of a bewildering mist of tulle. Nor did a certain light polonaise conceal the outlines of her charming figure. Even those who were constrained to whisper to each other that 'Miss Sally' must 'be

now going on twenty-five,' did so because she still carried the slender graces of seventeen. The organ swelled as if to welcome her; as she took her seat a ray of sunlight, that would have been cruel and searching to any other complexion, drifted across the faint pink of her cheeks, and nestling in her nebulous hair became itself transfigured. A few stained-glass Virtues on the windows did not come out of this effulgence as triumphantly, and it was small wonder that the devotional eyes of the worshippers wandered from them to the face of Sally Dows.

When the service was over, as the congregation filed slowly into the aisle, Courtland slipped mutely behind her. As she reached the porch he said in an undertone: 'I brought my horse and buggy. I thought you might possibly allow me to drive——' But he was stopped by a distressful knitting of her golden brows. 'No,' she said quickly, but firmly, 'you must not—it won't do.' As Courtland hesitated in momentary perplexity, she smiled sweetly: 'We'll walk round by the cemetery if you like, *it will take about as long as a drive.*' Courtland vanished, gave hurried instructions and a dollar to a lounging negro, and rejoined Miss Sally as the delighted and proud freedman drove out of the gate. Miss Sally heaved a slight sigh as the gallant equipage passed.

'It was a mighty pooty turn-out, co'nnle, and I'd have just admired to go, but it would have been rather hard on the other folks. There's the Reeds and Maxwells and Robertsons that are too pooah to keep blood horses, and too proud to ride behind anything else. It wouldn't be the right thing for us to go whirling by, scattering our dust over them.' There was something so subtly pleasant in this implied partnership of responsibility, that Courtland forgot the abrupt refusal and thought only of the tact that prompted it. Nevertheless, here a spell seemed to fall upon his usually ready speech. Now that they were together for the first time in a distinctly social fashion, he found himself vacantly, meaninglessly silent, content to walk beside this charming, summery presence, brushed by its delicate draperies, and inhaling its freshness. Presently it spoke.

'It would take more than a thousand feet of lumber to patch up the cowsheds beyond the Moseley pasture, and an entirely new building with an improved dairy would require only about two thousand more. All the old material would come in good for fencing, and could be used with the new post and rails. Don't yo' think it would be better to have an out-and-out new building?'

'Yes, certainly,' returned Courtland, a little confusedly. He had not calculated upon this

practical conversation, and was the more disconcerted as they were passing some of the other couples, who had purposely lingered to overhear them.

'And,' continued the young girl, brightly, 'the freight question is getting to be a pretty serious one. Aunt Miranda holds some shares in the Briggsville branch line, and thinks something could be done with the directors for a new tariff of charges if she put a pressure on them; Tyler says that there was some talk of their reducing it one-sixteenth per cent. before we move this year's crop.'

Courtland glanced quickly at his companion's face. It was grave, but there was the faintest wrinkling of the corner of the eyelid nearest him. 'Had we not better leave these *serious* questions until to-morrow?' he said smiling.

Miss Sally opened her eyes demurely. 'Why, you seemed *so* quiet, I reckoned you must be full o' business this morning; but if yo' prefer company talk, we'll change the subject. They say that yo and Miss Reed didn't have much trouble to find one last Sunday. She don't usually talk much but she keeps up a power of thinking. I should reckon,' she added, suddenly eying him critically 'that yo' and she might have a heap o' things to say to each other. She's a good deal in yo

fashion, connle, she don't forget, but'—more slowly—'I don't know that *that's* altogether the best thing for *yo'*!'

Courtland lifted his eyes with affected consternation. 'If this is in the light of another mysterious warning, Miss Dows, I warn you that my intellect is already tottering with them. Last Sunday Miss Reed thrilled me for an hour with superstition and Cassandra-like prophecy. Don't things ever happen accidentally here, and without warning?'

'I mean,' returned the young lady, with her usual practical directness, 'that Tave Reed remembers a good many horrid things about the wah that she ought to forget, but don't. But,' she continued, looking at him curiously, 'she allows she was mighty cut up by her cousin's manner to yo'.'

'I am afraid that Miss Reed was more annoyed than I was,' said Courtland. 'I should be very sorry if she attached any importance to it,' he added, earnestly.

'And *yo'* don't?' continued Miss Sally.

'No. Why should I?' She noticed, however that he had slightly drawn himself up a little more erect, and she smiled as he continued: 'I dare say I should feel as he does if I were in his place.'

'But *yo'* wouldn't do anything underhanded,' she said quietly. As he glanced at her quickly, she added drily: 'Don't trust too much to people always acting in yo' fashion, co'nnle. And don't think too much nor too little of what yo' hear here. Yo're just the kind of man to make a good many silly enemies, and as many foolish friends. And I don't know which will give yo' the most trouble. Only don't yo' underrate *either*, or hold yo' head so high, yo' don't see what's crawlin' around yo'. That's why, in a copper-head [1] swamp, a horse is bitten oftener than a hog.'

She smiled, yet with knitted brows and such a pretty affectation of concern for her companion, that he suddenly took heart.

'I wish I had *one* friend I could call my own,' he said, boldly looking straight into her eyes. 'I'd care little for other friends, and fear no enemies.'

'Yo're right, co'nnle,' she said, ostentatiously slanting her parasol in a marvellous simulation of hiding a purely imaginative blush on a cheek that was perfectly infantine in its unchanged pink; 'company talk is much pootier than what we've been saying. And—meaning me—for I reckon yo' wouldn't say that of any other girl but the one yo're walking with—what's the matter with *me*?'

[1] A venomous southern Serpent (*Trigonocephalus contortrix*).

He could not help smiling, though he hesitated. 'Nothing! but others have been disappointed.'

'And that bothers *you*?'

'I mean *I* have as yet had no right to put your feelings to any test, while——'

'Poor Chet had, yo' were going to say! Well, here we are at the cemetery! I reckoned yo' were bound to get back to the dead again before we'd gone far, and that's why I thought we might take the cemetery on our way. It may put me in a more proper frame of mind to please yo'.'

As he raised his eyes, he could not repress a slight start. He had not noticed before that they had passed through a small gateway on diverging from the road, and was quite unprepared to find himself on the edge of a gentle slope, leading to a beautiful valley, and before him a long vista of tombs, white headstones and low crosses, edged by drooping cypress and trailing feathery vines. Some vines had fallen and been caught in long loops from bough to bough, like funeral garlands, and here and there the tops of isolated palmettos lifted a cluster of hearse-like plumes. Yet in spite of this dominance of sombre but graceful shadow, the drooping delicacy of dark tasselled foliage and leafy fringes, and the waving mourning veils of grey, translucent moss, a glorious vivifying Southern sun smiled and glittered everywhere as

through tears. The balm of bay, southernwood, pine, and syringa breathed through the long alleys; the stimulating scent of roses moved with every zephyr, and the closer odours of jessamine, honeysuckle, and orange-flowers hung heavily in the hollows. It seemed to Courtland like the mourning of beautiful and youthful widowhood, seductive even in its dissembling trappings, provocative in the contrast of its own still strong virility. Everywhere the grass grew thick and luxuriant; the quick earth was teeming with the germination of the dead below.

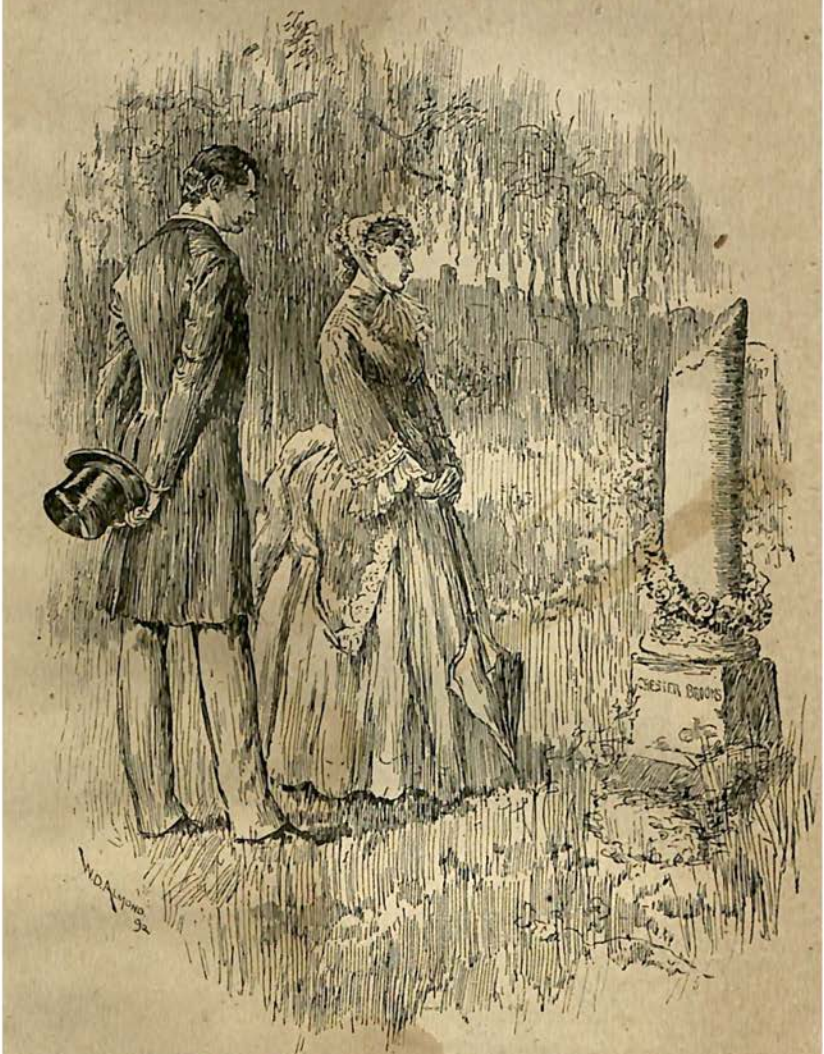
They moved slowly along side by side, speaking only of the beauty of the spot and the glory of that summer day, which seemed to have completed its perfection here. Perhaps from the heat, the overpowering perfume, or some unsuspected sentiment, the young lady became presently as silent and preoccupied as her companion. She began to linger and loiter behind, hovering like a butterfly over some flowering shrub or clustered sheaf of lilies, until, encountered suddenly in her floating draperies, she might have been taken for a somewhat early and far too becoming ghost. It seemed to him also that her bright eyes were slightly shadowed by a gentle thoughtfulness. He moved close to her side with an irresistible impulse of tenderness, but she turned suddenly,

and saying, 'Come!' moved at a quicker pace down a narrow side path. Courtland followed. He had not gone far before he noticed that the graves seemed to fall into regular lines, the emblems became cheaper and more common; wooden head- and foot-stones of one monotonous pattern took the place of carved freestone or marble, and he knew that they had reached that part of the cemetery reserved for those who had fallen in the war. The long lines drawn with military precision stretched through the little valley, and again up the opposite hill in an odd semblance of hollow squares, ranks, and columns. A vague recollection of the fateful slope of Snake River came over him. It was intensified as Miss Sally, who was still preceding him, suddenly stopped before an isolated mound, bearing a broken marble shaft and a pedestal with the inscription: 'Chester Brooks.' A few withered garlands and *immortelles* were lying at its base, but encircling the broken shaft was a perfectly fresh, unfaded wreath.

'You never told me he was buried here?' said Courtland quickly, half shocked at the unexpected revelation. 'Was he from this State?'

'No, but his regiment was,' said Miss Sally eyeing the wreath critically.

'And this wreath, is it from you?' continued Courtland gently.



'AND THIS WREATH, IS IT FROM YOU?' CONTINUED COURTLAND GENTLY

'Yes, I thought yo'ld like to see something fresh and pooty, instead of those stale ones.'

'And were they also from you?' he asked even more gently.

'Dear no! They were left over from last anniversary day by some of the veterans. That's the only one I put there—that is—I got Mr. Champney to leave it here on his way to his house. He lives just yonder, yo' know.'

It was impossible to resist this invincible *naïveté*. Courtland bit his lip as the vision arose before him of this still more *naïf* English admirer bringing hither, at Miss Sally's bidding, the tribute which she wished to place on the grave of an old lover to please a *third* man. Meantime she had put her two little hands behind her back in the simulated attitude of 'a good girl,' and was saying half smilingly, and he even thought half wistfully:

'Are yo' satisfied?'

'Perfectly.'

'Then let's go away. It's mighty hot here.'

They turned away, and descending the slope again re-entered the thicker shade of the main avenue. Here they seemed to have left the sterner aspect of Death. They walked slowly; the air was heavy with the hot incense of flowers; the road sinking a little left a grassy bank on one side. Here Miss Sally halted and listlessly seated

herself, motioning Courtland to do the same. He obeyed eagerly. The incident of the wreath had troubled him, albeit with contending sensations. She had given it to please *him*; why should *he* question the manner, or torment himself with any retrospective thought? He would have given worlds to have been able to accept it lightly or gallantly—with any other girl he could—but he knew he was trembling on the verge of a passionate declaration; the magnitude of the stake was too great to be imperilled by a levity of which she was more a mistress than himself, and he knew that his sentiment had failed to impress her. His pride kept him from appealing to her strangely practical nature, although he had recognised and accepted it, and had even begun to believe it an essential part of the strong fascination she had over him. But being neither a coward, nor a weak, hesitating idealist, when he deliberately took his seat beside her he as deliberately made up his mind to accept his fate, whatever it might be, then and there.

Perhaps there was something of this in his face. 'I thought yo' were looking a little white, co'nnle,' she said quietly, 'and I reckoned we might sit down a spell, and then take it slowly home. Yo' ain't accustomed to the So'th'n sun, and the air in the hollow *was* swampy.' As he made a slight

gesture of denial, she went on with a pretty sisterly superiority: 'That's the way of yo' No'th'n men. Yo' think yo' can do everything just as if yo' were reared to it, and yo' never make allowance for different climates, different blood, and different customs. That's where you slip up.'

But he was already leaning towards her with his dark earnest eyes fixed upon her in a way she could no longer mistake. 'At the risk of slipping up again, Miss Dows,' he said gently, dropping into her dialect with utterly unconscious flattery, 'I am going to ask you to teach me everything *you* wish, to be all that *you* demand—which would be far better. You have said we were good friends; I want you to let me hope to be more. I want you to overlook my deficiencies and the differences of my race and let me meet you on the only level where I can claim to be the equal of your own people—that of loving you. Give me only the same chance you gave the other poor fellow who sleeps yonder—the same chance you gave the luckier man who carried the wreath for you to put upon his grave.'

She had listened with delicately knitted brows, the faintest touch of colour and a half laughing, half superior disapprobation. When he had finished, she uttered a plaintive little sigh. 'Yo' oughtn't to have said that, co'nnle, but yo' and me

are too good friends to let even *that* stand between us. And to prove it to yo' I'm going to forget it right away—and so are yo'.'

'But I cannot,' he said quickly; 'if I could I should be unworthy of even your friendship. If you must reject it, do not make me feel the shame of thinking you believe me capable of wanton trifling. I know that this avowal is abrupt to you, but it is not to me. You have known me only for three months, but these three months have been to me the realisation of three years' dreaming!' As she remained looking at him with bright, curious eyes, but still shaking her fair head distressedly, he moved nearer and caught her hand in the little pale lilac thread glove that was, nevertheless, too wide for her small fingers, and said appealingly: 'But why should *you* forget it? Why must it be a forbidden topic? What is the barrier? Are you no longer free?' Speak, Miss Dows—give me some hope. Miss Dows!—Sally!'

She had drawn herself away, distressed, protesting, her fair head turned aside, until with a slight twist and narrowing of her hand she succeeded in slipping it from the glove which she left a prisoner in his eager clasp. 'There! Yo' can keep the glove, co'nnle,' she said, breathing quickly. 'Sit down! This is not the place nor the weather for

husking frolics! Well!—yo' want to know *why* yo' mustn't speak to me in that way. Be still, and I'll tell yo'.'

She smoothed down the folds of her frock, sitting sideways on the bank, one little foot touching the road. 'Yo' mustn't speak that way to me,' she went on slowly, 'because it's as much as yo' company's wo'th, as much as *our* property's wo'th, as much maybe as yo' life's wo'th! Don't lift yo' comb, co'nnle; if you don't care for *that*, others may. Sit still, I tell yo'! Well, yo' come here from the No'th to run this property for money —that's square and fair business; *that* any fool here can understand—its No'th'n style; it don't interfere with these fools' family affairs; it don't bring into their blood any No'th'n taint; it don't divide their clannishness; it don't separate father and son, sister and brother; and even if yo' got a foothold here and settled down, they know they can always outvote yo' five to one! But let these same fools know that yo're courtin' a So'th'n girl known to be "Union" during the wah, that girl who has laughed at their foolishness; let them even *think* that he wants that girl to mix up the family and the race and the property for him, and there ain't a young or old fool that believes in So'th'n isolation as the price of So'th'n salvation that wouldn't rise against yo'! There isn't one

that wouldn't make shipwreck of yo'r syndicate and yo'r capital and the prosperity of Redlands for the next four years to come, and think they were doing right! They began to suspect yo' from the first! They suspected yo' when yo' never went anywhere, but stuck close to the fahm and me. That's why I wanted yo' to show yourself among the girls; they wouldn't have minded yo' flirting with them with the chance of yo' breaking yo' heart over Tave Reed or Lympy Morris! They're fools enough to believe that a snub or a jilt from a So'th'n girl would pay them back for a lost battle or a ruined plantation!'

For the first time Miss Sally saw Courtland's calm blood fly to his cheek, and kindle in his eye. 'You surely do not expect *me* to tolerate this blind and insolent interference!' he said, rising to his feet.

She lifted her ungloved hand in deprecation. 'Sit still, co'nnle. Yo've been a soldier, and yo' know what duty is. Well! what's yo' duty to yo' company?'

'It neither includes my private affairs, nor regulates the beating of my heart. I will resign.'

'And leave me and Aunt Miranda, and the plantation?'

'No! The company will find another super-

intendent to look after your aunt's affairs, and carry out our plans. And you, Sally—you will let me find you a home and fortune north? There is work for me there; there is room for you among my people.'

She shook her head slowly with a sweet but superior smile. 'No, co'nnle! I didn't believe in the wah, but the least I could do was to stand by my folks and share the punishment that I knew was coming from it. I despise this foolishness as much as yo', but I can't run away from it. Come, co'nnle, I won't ask yo' to forget this; mo', I'll even believe yo' *meant* it, but yo'll promise me yo' won't speak of it again as long as yo' are with the company and Aunt Miranda and me! There mustn't be more—there mustn't even *seem* to be more—between us.'

'But *then* I may hope?' he said, eagerly grasping her hand.

'I promise nothing, for yo' must not even have *that* excuse for speaking of this again, either from anything I do, or may seem to do.' She stopped, released her hand, as her eyes were suddenly fixed on the distance. Then she said with a slight smile, but without the least embarrassment or impatience: 'There's Mr. Champney coming here now. I reckon he's looking to see if that wreath is safe.'

Courtland looked up quickly. He could see the straw hat of the young Englishman just above the myrtle bushes in a path intersecting the avenue. A faint shadow crossed his face. 'Let me know one thing more,' he said hurriedly. 'I know I have no right to ask the question, but has—has—has Mr. Champney anything to do with your decision?'

She smiled brightly. 'Yo' asked just now if yo' could have the same chance he and Chet Brooks had. Well, poor Chet is dead, and Mr. Champney—well!—wait and see.' She lifted her voice and called: 'Mr. Champney.' The young fellow came briskly towards them; his face betrayed a slight surprise, but no discomfiture, as he recognised her companion.

'Oh, Mr. Champney,' said Miss Sally, plaintively, 'I've lost my glove somewhere near pooah Brooks's tomb in the hollow. Won't you go and fetch it, and come back here to take me home? The co'nnle has got to go and see his sick niggers in the hospital.' Champney lifted his hat, nodded genially to Courtland, and disappeared below the cypresses on the slope. 'Yo' mustn't be mad,' she said, turning in explanation to her companion, 'but we have been here too long already, and it's better that I should be seen coming home with him than yo'.'

'Then this sectional interference does not touch him?' said Courtland bitterly.

'No. He's an Englishman; his father was a known friend of the Confederacy, and bought their cotton bonds.'

She stopped, gazing into Courtland's face with a pretty vague impatience and a slight pouting of her lip.

'Co'nnle!'

'Miss Sally.'

'Yo' say yo' had known me for three years before yo' saw me. Well, we met once before we ever spoke to each other!'

Courtland looked in her laughing eyes with admiring wonder. 'When?' he asked.

'The first day yo' came! Yo' moved the ladder when I was on the cornice, and I walked all over yo' head. And, like a gentleman, yo' never said a word about it. I reckon I stood on yo' head for five minutes.'

'Not as long as that,' said Courtland laughing, 'if I remember rightly.'

'Yes,' said Miss Sally with dancing eyes. 'I, a So'th'n girl, actually set my foot on the head of a No'th'n scum of a co'nnle! My!'

'Let that satisfy your friends then.'

'No! *I* want to apologise. Sit down, co'nnle.'

HE FELT THE SOFT TOUCH OF HER SMALL HANDS ON HIS SHOULDERS

'But, Miss Sally——'

'Sit down, quick!'

He did so, seating himself sideways on the bank. Miss Sally stood beside him.

'Take off yo' hat, sir.'

He obeyed smilingly. Miss Sally suddenly slipped behind him. He felt the soft touch of her small hands on his shoulders; a warm breath stirred the roots of his hair, and then—the light pressure on his scalp of what seemed the lips of a child.

He leaped to his feet, yet before he could turn completely round—a difficulty the young lady had evidently calculated upon—he was too late! The floating draperies of the artful and shameless Miss Sally were already disappearing among the tombs in the direction of the hollow.

CHAPTER V

THE house occupied by the manager of the Drummond Syndicate in Redlands—the former residence of a local lawyer and justice of the peace—was not large, but had an imposing portico of wooden Doric columns, which extended to the roof and fronted the main street. The all-pervading

creeper closely covered it; the sidewalk before it was shaded by a row of broad-leaved ailantus. The front room, with French windows opening on the portico, was used by Colonel Courtland as a general office; beyond this a sitting-room and dining-room overlooked the old-fashioned garden with its detached kitchen and inevitable negro cabin. It was a close evening; there were dark clouds coming up in the direction of the turnpike road, but the leaves of the ailantus hung heavy and motionless in the hush of an impending storm. The sparks of lazily floating fireflies softly expanded and went out in the gloom of the black foliage, or in the dark recesses of the office, whose windows were widely open, and whose lights Courtland had extinguished when he brought his armchair to the portico for coolness. One of these sparks beyond the fence, although alternately glowing and paling, was still so persistent and stationary that Courtland leaned forward to watch it more closely, at which it disappeared, and a voice from the street said:

'Is that you, Courtland?'

'Yes. Come in, won't you?'

The voice was Champney's, and the light was from his cigar. As he opened the gate and came slowly up the steps of the portico the usual hesitation of his manner seemed to have increased. A

long sigh trilled the limp leaves of the ailantus and as quickly subsided. A few heavy perpendicular raindrops crashed and spattered through the foliage like molten lead.

'You've just escaped the shower,' said Courtland pleasantly. He had not seen Champney since they parted in the cemetery six weeks before.

'Yes!—I—I thought I'd like to have a little talk with you, Courtland,' said Champney. He hesitated a moment before the proffered chair, and then added, with a cautious glance towards the street, 'Hadn't we better go *inside*?'

'As you like. But you'll find it wofully hot We're quite alone here; there's nobody in the house, and this shower will drive any loungers from the street.' He was quite frank, although their relations to each other in regard to Miss Sally were still so undefined as to scarcely invite his confidence.

Howbeit Champney took the proffered chair and the glass of julep which Courtland brought him.

'You remember my speaking to you of Dumont?' he said hesitatingly, 'Miss Dows's French cousin, you know? Well—he's coming here: he's got property here—those three houses opposite the Court House. From what I hear,

he's come over with a lot of new-fangled French ideas on the nigger question—rot about equality and fraternity, don't you know—and the highest education and highest offices for them. You know what the feeling is here already? You know what happened at the last election at Coolidgeville—how the whites wouldn't let the niggers go to the polls and the jolly row that was kicked up over it? Well, it looks as if that sort of thing might happen *here*, don't you know, if Miss Dows takes up these ideas.'

'But I've reason to suppose—I mean,' said Courtland correcting himself with some deliberation—'that any one who knows Miss Dows's opinions knows that these are not *her* views. Why should she take them up?'

'Because she takes *him* up,' returned Champney hurriedly; 'and even if she didn't believe in them herself, she'd have to share the responsibility with him in the eyes of every unreconstructed rowdy like Tom Higbee and the rest of them. They'd make short work of her niggers all the same.'

'But I don't see why she should be made responsible for the opinions of her cousin, nor do I exactly know what "taking him up" means,' returned Courtland quietly.

Champney moistened his dry lips with the

julep and uttered a nervous laugh. 'Suppose we say *her husband*—for that's what his coming back here means. Everybody knows that; *you* would, too, if you ever talked with her about anything but *business*.'

A bright flash of lightning that lit up the faces of the two men would have revealed Champney's flushed features and Courtland's lack of colour had they been looking at each other. But they were not, and the long reverberating crash of thunder which followed prevented any audible reply from Courtland, and covered his agitation.

For without fully accepting Champney's conclusions he was cruelly shocked at the young man's utterance of them. He had scrupulously respected the wishes of Miss Sally and had faithfully—although never hopelessly—held back any expression of his own love since their conversation in the cemetery. But while his native truthfulness and sense of honour had overlooked the seeming insincerity of her attitude towards Champney, he had never justified his own tacit participation in it, and the concealment of his own pretensions before his possible rival. It was true that she had forbidden him to openly enter the lists with her admirers, but Champney's innocent assumption of his indifference to her and his consequent half confidences added poignancy to his story. There

seemed to be only one way to extricate himself, and that was by a quarrel. Whether he did or did not believe Champney's story, whether it was only the jealous exaggeration of a rival, or Miss Sally was actually deceiving them both, his position had become intolerable.

'I must remind you, Champney,' he said, with freezing deliberation, 'that Miss Miranda Dows and her niece now represent the Drummond Company equally with myself, and that you cannot expect me to listen to any reflections upon the way they choose to administer their part in its affairs, either now, or to come. Still less do I care to discuss the idle gossip which can affect only the *private* interests of these ladies, with which neither you nor I have any right to interfere.'

But the *naïveté* of the young Englishman was as invincible as Miss Sally's own, and as fatal to Courtland's attitude. 'Of course I haven't any *right*, you know,' he said, calmly ignoring the severe preamble of his companion's speech, 'but I say! hang it all! even if a fellow has no chance *himself*, he don't like to see a girl throw herself and her property away on a man like that.'

'One moment, Champney,' said Courtland, under the infection of his guest's simplicity, abandoning his former superior attitude. 'You say you have no chance. Do you want me to

understand that you are regularly a suitor of Miss Dows?'

'Y-e-e-s,' said the young fellow, but with the hesitation of conscientiousness rather than evasion. 'That is—you know I *was*. But don't you see, it couldn't be. It wouldn't do, you know. If those clannish neighbours of hers—that Southern set—suspected that Miss Sally was courted by an Englishman, don't you know—a poacher on their preserves—it would be all up with her position on the property and her influence over them. I don't mind telling you that's one reason why I left the Company and took that other plantation. But even that didn't work; they had their suspicions excited already.'

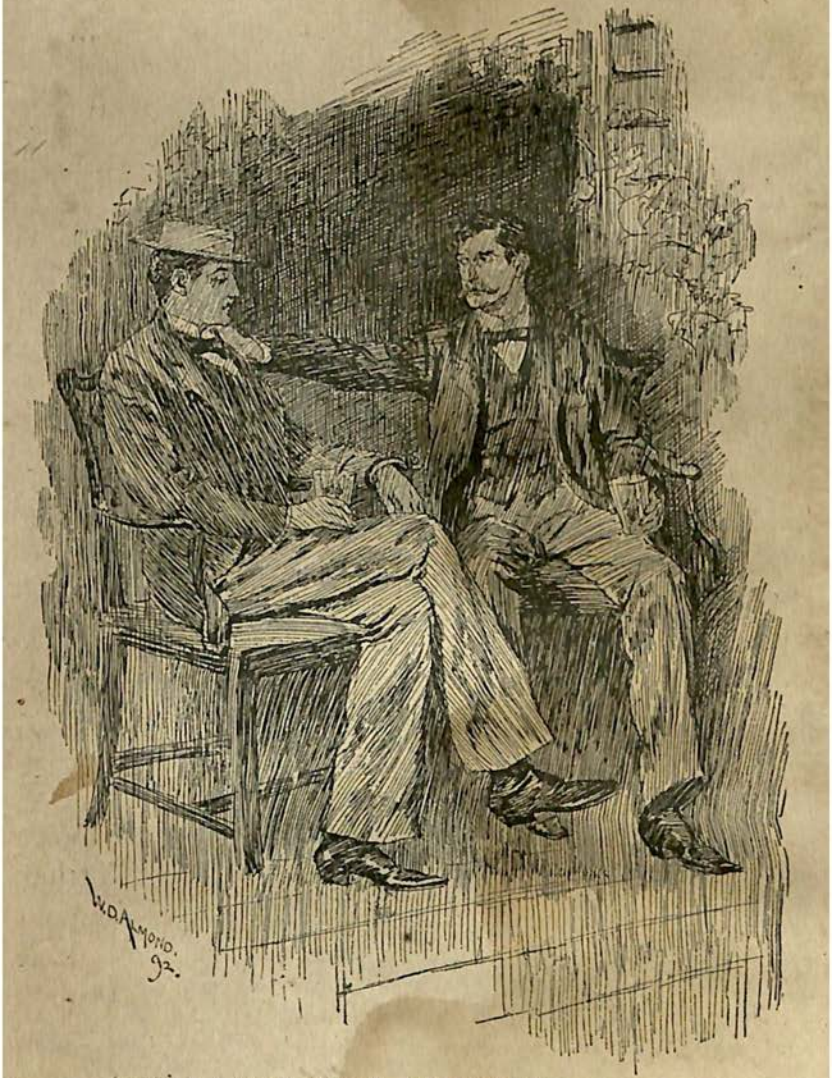
'Did Miss Dows give that as a reason for declining your suit?' asked Courtland, slowly.

'Yes. You know what a straightforward girl she is. She didn't come no rot about "not expecting anything of the kind," or about "being a sister to me," and all that, for, by Jove! she's always more like a fellow's sister, don't you know, than his girl. Of course it was hard lines for me, but I suppose she was about right.' He stopped, and then added with a kind of gentle persistency: '*You* think she was about right, don't you?'

With what was passing in Courtland's mind the question seemed so bitterly ironical that at first

he leaned half angrily forward, in an unconscious attempt to catch the speaker's expression in the darkness. 'I should hardly venture to give an opinion,' he said, after a pause. 'Miss Dows's relations with her neighbours are so very peculiar. And from what you tell me of her cousin it would seem that her desire to placate them is not always to be depended upon.'

'I'm not finding fault with *her*, you know,' said Champney hastily. 'I'm not such a beastly cad as that; I wouldn't have spoken of my affairs at all, but you asked, you know. I only thought, if she was going to get herself into trouble on account of that Frenchman, you might talk to her —she'd listen to you, because she'd know you only did it out of business reasons. And they're really business reasons, you know. I suppose you don't think much of my business capacity, colonel, and you wouldn't go much on my judgment—especially now; but I've been here longer than you and—' he lowered his voice slightly and dragged his chair nearer Courtland—'I don't like the looks of things here. There's some devilment plotting among those rascals. They're only awaiting an opportunity; a single flash would be enough to set them in a blaze, even if the fire wasn't lit and smouldering already like a spark in a bale of cotton. I'd cut the whole thing and clear out if I



'YOU'RE A GOOD FELLOW, CHAMPNEY,' SAID COURTLAND

didn't think it would make it harder for Miss Dows, who would be left alone.'

'You're a good fellow, Champney,' said Courtland, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder with a sudden impulse, 'and I forgive you for overlooking any concern that *I* might have. Indeed,' he added, with an odd seriousness and a half sigh, 'it's not strange that you should. But I must remind you that the Dowses are strictly the agents and tenants of the company I represent, and that their rights and property under that tenancy shall not be interfered with by others as long as I am here. I have no right, however,' he added gravely, 'to keep Miss Dows from imperilling them by her social relations.'

Champney rose and shook hands with him awkwardly. 'The shower seems to be holding up,' he said, 'and I'll toddle along before it starts afresh. Good-night! I say—you didn't mind my coming to you this way, did you? By Jove! I thought you were a little stand-offish at first. But you know what I meant?'

'Perfectly, and I thank you.' They shook hands again. Champney stepped from the portico, and, reaching the gate, seemed to vanish as he had come, out of the darkness.

The storm was not yet over; the air had again become close and suffocating. Courtland remained

brooding in his chair. Whether he could accept Champney's news as true or not, he felt that he must end this suspense at once. A half guilty consciousness that he was thinking more of it in reference to his own passion than his duty to the company did not render his meditations less unpleasant. Yet while he could not reconcile Miss Sally's confidences in the cemetery concerning the indifference of her people to Champney's attentions with what Champney had just told him of the reasons she had given *him* for declining them, I am afraid he was not shocked by her peculiar ethics. A lover seldom finds fault with his mistress for deceiving his rival, and is as little apt to consider the logical deduction that she could deceive him also, as Othello was to accept Brabantio's warning. The masculine sense of honour which might have resented the friendship of a man capable of such treachery did not hesitate to accept the love of a woman under the same conditions. Perhaps there was an implied compliment in thus allowing her to take the sole ethical responsibility, which few women would resist.

In the midst of this gloomy abstraction Courtland suddenly raised his head and listened.

'Cato.'

'Yes, sah.'

There was a sound of heavy footsteps in the

hall coming from the rear of the house, and presently a darker bulk appeared in the shadowed doorway. It was his principal overseer—a strong and superior negro, selected by his fellow-freedmen from among their number in accordance with Courtland's new *régime*.

'Did you come here from the plantation or the town?'

'The town, sah.'

'I think you had better keep out of the town in the evenings for the present,' said Courtland in a tone of quiet but positive authority.

'Are dey goin' to bring back de ole "patter rollers,"[1] sah?' asked the man with a slight sneer.

'I don't know,' returned Courtland, calmly, ignoring his overseer's manner. 'But if they did you must comply with the local regulations unless they conflict with the Federal laws, when you must appeal to the Federal authorities. I prefer you should avoid any trouble until you are sure.'

'I reckon they won't try any games on me,' said the negro with a short laugh.

Courtland looked at him intently.

'I thought as much! You're carrying arms, Cato! Hand them over.'

The overseer hesitated for a moment, and

[1] *I.e.* the 'patrol' or local police, who formerly had the surveillance of slaves.

then unstrapped a revolver from his belt, and handed it to Courtland.

'Now how many of you are in the habit of going round the town armed like this?'

'Only de men who've been insulted, sah.'

'And how have *you* been insulted?'

'Marse Tom Higbee down in de market reckoned it was high time fancy niggers was drov into de swamp, and I allowed that loafers and beggars had better roost high when workin' folks was around, and Marse Tom said he'd cut my haht out.'

'And do you think your carrying a revolver will prevent him and his friends performing that operation if you provoked them?'

'You said we was to pertect ourseffs, sah,' returned the negro gloomily. 'What foh den did you drill us to use dem rifles in de armoury?'

'To defend yourselves *together* under orders if attacked, not to singly threaten with them in a street row. Together, you would stand some chance against those men; separately they could eat you up, Cato.'

'I wouldn't trust too much to some of dem niggers standing together, sah,' said Cato darkly. 'Dey'd run before de old masters—if they didn't run to 'em. Shuah!'

A fear of this kind had crossed Courtland's

mind before, but he made no present comment. 'I found two of the armoury rifles in the men's cabins yesterday,' he resumed quietly. 'See that it does not occur again! They must not be taken from the armoury except to defend it.'

'Yes, sah.'

There was a moment of silence. Then it was broken by a sudden gust that swept through the columns of the portico, stirring the vines. The broad leaves of the ailantus began to rustle; an ominous pattering followed; the rain had recommenced. And as Courtland rose and walked towards the open window its blank panes and the interior of the office were suddenly illuminated by a gleam of returning lightning.

He entered the office, bidding Cato follow, and lit the lamp above his desk. The negro remained standing gloomily but respectfully by the window.

'Cato, do you know anything of Mr. Dumont —Miss Dows's cousin?'

The negro's white teeth suddenly flashed in the lamplight. 'Ya! ha! I reckon, sah.'

'Then he's a great friend of your people?'

'I don't know about dat, sah. But he's a pow'ful enemy of de Reeds and de Higbees!'

'On account of his views, of course?'

''Deed no!' said Cato with an astounded air. 'less on account of de *vendetta*!'

'The *vendetta*?'

'Yes, sah. De old blood quo'll of de families. It's been goin' on over fifty years, sah. De granfader, fader, and brudder of de Higbees was killed by de granfader, fader, and brudder of de Doomonts. De Reeds chipped in when all de Higbees was played out, fo' dey was relations, but dey was chawed up by some of de Dowses, first cousins to de Doomonts.'

'What? Are the Dows in this *vendetta*?'

'No, sah. No mo'. Dey's bin no man in de family since Miss Sally's fader died—dat's let de Dows out fo' ever. De las' shootin' was done by Marse George Doomont, who crippled Marse Tom Higbee's brudder Jo, and den skipped to Europe. Dey say he's come back, and is lying low over at Atalanty. Dar'll be lively times ef he comes here to see Miss Sally.'

'But he may have changed his ideas while living abroad, where this sort of thing is simple murder.'

The negro shook his head grimly. 'Den he wouldn't come, sah. No, sah. He knows dat Tom Higbee's bound to go fo' him or leave de place, and Marse George wouldn't mind settlin' *him* too as well as his brudder, for de scores is agin' de Doomonts yet. And Marse George ain't no slouch wid a scatter gun.'

At any other time the imminence of this survival of a lawless barbarism of which he had heard so much would have impressed Courtland; now he was only interested in it on account of the inconceivable position in which it left Miss Sally. Had she anything to do with this baleful cousin's return, or was she only to be a helpless victim of it?

A white, dazzling, and bewildering flash of lightning suddenly lit up the room, the porch, the dripping ailantus, and the flooded street beyond. It was followed presently by a crash of thunder with what seemed to be a second fainter flash of lightning, or rather as if the first flash had suddenly ignited some inflammable substance. With the long reverberation of the thunder still shaking the house, Courtland slipped quickly out of the window and passed down to the gate.

'Did it strike anything, sah?' said the startled negro, as Courtland returned.

'Not that I can see,' said his employer shortly. 'Go inside, and call Zoë and her daughter from the cabin and bring them in the hall. Stay till I come. Go!—I'll shut the windows myself.'

'It must have struck somewhere, sah, shuah. Deh's a pow'ful smell of sulphur right here,' said the negro as he left the room.

Courtland thought so too, but it was a kind of sulphur that he had smelt before—on the battle

THERE WAS THE DISTINCT HOLE MADE BY A BULLET.

field! For when the door was closed behind his overseer he took the lamp to the opposite wall and examined it carefully. There was the distinct hole made by a bullet which had missed Cato's head at the open window by an inch.

CHAPTER VI

In an instant Courtland had regained complete possession of himself. His distracting passion—how distracting he had never before realised—was gone! His clear sight—no longer distorted by sentiment—had come back; he saw everything in its just proportion—his duty, the plantation, the helpless freedman threatened by lawless fury; the two women—no longer his *one* tantalising vision, but now only a passing detail of the work before him. He saw them through no aberrating mist of tenderness or expediency—but with the single directness of the man of action.

The shot had clearly been intended for Cato. Even if it were an act of mere personal revenge, it showed a confidence and security in the would-be assassin that betokened co-operation and an organised plan. He had availed himself of the thunder-storm, the flash and long reverberating roll of sound—an artifice not unknown to border

ambush—to confuse discovery at the instant. Yet the attack might be only an isolated one; or it might be the beginning of a general raid upon the Syndicate's freedmen. If the former, he could protect Cato from its repetition by guarding him in the office until he could be conveyed to a place of safety; if the latter, he must at once collect the negroes at their quarters, and take Cato with him. He resolved upon the latter course. The quarters were half a mile from the Dows' dwelling —which was two miles away.

He sat down and wrote a few lines to Miss Dows stating that, in view of some threatened disturbances in the town, he thought it advisable to keep the negroes in their quarters, whither he was himself going. He sent her his housekeeper and the child, as they had both better remain in a place of security until he returned to town. He gave the note to Zoë, bidding her hasten by the back garden across the fields. Then he turned to Cato.

'I am going with you to the quarters to-night,' he said quietly, 'and you can carry your pistol back to the armoury yourself.' He handed him the weapon. The negro received it gratefully, but suddenly cast a searching glance at his employer. Courtland's face, however, betrayed no change. When Zoë had gone, he continued

tranquilly, 'We will go by the back way through the woods.' As the negro started slightly, Courtland continued in the same even tone: 'The sulphur you smelt just now, Cato, was the smoke of a gun fired at *you* from the street. I don't propose that the shot shall be repeated under the same advantages.'

The negro became violently agitated. 'It was dat sneakin' hound Tom Higbee,' he said huskily.

Courtland looked at him sharply. 'Then there was something more than *words* passed between him and you, Cato. What happened? Come, speak out!'

'He lashed me with his whip, and I gib him one right under the yeah, and drupped him,' said Cato, recovering his courage with his anger at the recollection. 'I had a right to defend myself, sah.'

'Yes, and I hope you'll be able to do it now,' said Courtland calmly, his face giving no sign of his conviction that Cato's fate was doomed by that single retaliating blow. 'But you'll be safer at the quarters.' He passed into his bedroom, took a revolver from his bedhead and a derringer from the drawer, both of which he quickly slipped beneath his buttoned coat, and returned.

'When we are in the fields, clear of the house,

keep close by my side, and even try to keep step with me. What you have to say, say *now*; there must be no talking to betray our position—we must go silently, and you'll have enough to do to exercise your eyes and ears. I shall stand between you and any attack, but I expect you to obey orders without hesitation.' He opened the back door, motioned to Cato to pass out, followed him, locked the door behind them, and taking the negro's arm walked beside the low palings to the end of the garden, where they climbed the fence and stood upon the open field beyond.

Unfortunately, it had grown lighter with the breaking of the heavy clouds, and gusty gleams of moonlight chased each other over the field, or struck a glitter from standing rain-pools between the little hillocks. To cross the open field and gain the fringe of woods on the other side was the nearest way to the quarters, but for the moment was the most exposed course; to follow the hedge to the bottom of the field and the boundary fence and then cross at right angles, in its shadow, would be safer, but they would lose valuable time. Believing that Cato's vengeful assailant was still hovering near with his comrades, Courtland cast a quick glance down the shadowy line of Osage hedge beside them. Suddenly Cato grasped his

arm and pointed in the same direction, where the boundary fence he had noticed—a barrier of rough palings—crossed the field. With the moon low on the other side of it, it was a mere black silhouette, broken only by bright silver openings and gaps along its surface that indicated the moonlit field beyond. At first Courtland saw nothing else. Then he was struck by the fact that these openings became successively and regularly *eclipsed*, as with the passing of some opaque object behind them. It was a file of men on the *other* side of the fence, keeping in its shelter as they crossed the field towards his house. Roughly calculating from the passing obscurations, there must have been twelve or fifteen in all.

He could no longer doubt their combined intentions, nor hesitate how to meet them. He must at once make for the quarters with Cato, even if he had to cross that open field before them. He knew that they would avoid injuring *him* personally, in the fear of possible Federal and political complications, and he resolved to use that fear to ensure Cato's safety. Placing his hands on the negro's shoulders, he shoved him forwards, falling into a 'lock step' so close behind him that it became impossible for the most expert marksman to fire at one without imperilling the other's life. When half way across the field he noticed that the

shadows seen though the openings of the fence had paused. The ambushed men had evidently seen the double apparition, understood it, and, as he expected, dared not fire. He reached the other side with Cato in safety, but not before he saw the fateful shadows again moving, and this time in their own direction. They were evidently intending to pursue them. But once within the woods Courtland knew that his chances were equal. He breathed more freely. Cato, now less agitated, had even regained something of his former emotional combativeness which Courtland had checked. Although far from confident of his henchman's prowess in an emergency, the prospect of getting him safe into the quarters seemed brighter.

It was necessary also to trust to his superior wood-craft and knowledge of the locality, and Courtland still walking between him and his pursuers and covering his retreat allowed him to lead the way. It lay over ground that was beginning to slope gently; the underbrush was presently exchanged for springy moss, the character of the trees changed, the black trunks of cypresses made the gloom thicker. Trailing vines and parasites brushed their faces, a current of damp air seemed to flow just above the soil in which their lower limbs moved sluggishly as

through stagnant water. As yet there was no indication of pursuit. But Courtland felt that it was not abandoned. Indeed, he had barely time to check an exclamation from the negro, before the dull gallop of horse-hoofs in the open ahead of them was plain to them both. It was a second party of their pursuers, mounted, who had evidently been sent to prevent their final egress from the woods, while those they had just evaded were no doubt slowly and silently following them on foot. They were to be caught between two fires!

'What is there to the left of us?' whispered Courtland quickly.

'De swamp.'

Courtland set his teeth together. His dull-witted companion had evidently walked them both into the trap! Nevertheless, his resolve was quickly made. He could already see through the thinning fringe of timber the figures of the mounted men in the moonlight.

'This should be the boundary line of the plantation? This field beside us is ours?' he said, interrogatively.

'Yes,' returned the negro, 'but de quarters is a mile furder.'

'Good! Stay here until I come back or call you; I'm going to talk to these fellows. But if you value your life don't *you* speak nor stir.'

He strode quickly through the intervening trees and stepped out into the moonlight. A suppressed shout greeted him, and half a dozen mounted men, masked and carrying rifles, rode down towards him, but he remained quietly waiting there, and as the nearest approached him, he made a step forward and cried 'Halt!'

The men pulled up sharply and mechanically at that ring of military imperiousness.

'What are you doing here?' said Courtland.

'We reckon that's *our* business, co'nnle.'

'It's *mine*, when you're on property that I control.'

The man hesitated and looked interrogatively towards his fellows. 'I allow you've got us there, co'nnle,' he said at last with the lazy insolence of conscious power, 'but I don't mind telling you we're wanting a nigger about the size of your Cato. We hain't got anything agin *you*, co'nnle; we don't want to interfere with *your* property, and your ways, but we don't calculate to have strangers interfere with *our* ways and *our* customs. Trot out your nigger—you No'th'n folks don't call *him* "property," you know—and we'll clear off your land.'

'And may I ask what you want of Cato?' said Courtland quietly.

'To show him that all the Federal law in

h—ll won't protect him when he strikes a white man!' burst out one of the masked figures, riding forward.

'Then you compel me to show *you*,' said Courtland, immovably, 'what any Federal citizen may do in the defence of Federal law. For I'll kill the first man that attempts to lay hands upon him on my property. Some of you, who have already tried to assassinate him in cold blood, I have met before in less dishonourable warfare than this, and *they* know I am able to keep my word.'

There was a moment's silence; the barrel of the revolver he was holding at his side glistened for an instant in the moonlight, but he did not move. The two men rode up to the first speaker and exchanged words. A light laugh followed, and the first speaker turned again to Courtland with a mocking politeness.

'Very well, co'nnle, if that's your opinion, and you allow we can't follow our game over your property, why we reckon we'll have to give way *to those who can*. Sorry to have troubled *you*. Good-night.'

He lifted his hat ironically, waved it to his followers, and the next moment the whole party were galloping furiously towards the high road.

For the first time that evening a nervous sense

of apprehension passed over Courtland. The impending of some unknown danger is always more terrible to a brave man than the most overwhelming odds that he can see and realise. He felt instinctively that they had uttered no vague bravado to cover up their defeat; there was still some advantage on which they confidently reckoned—but what? Was it only a reference to the other party tracking them through the woods on which their enemies now solely relied? He regained Cato quickly; the white teeth of the foolishly confident negro were already flashing his imagined triumph to his employer. Courtland's heart grew sick as he saw it.

'We're not out of the woods yet, Cato,' he said drily—'nor are they. Keep your eyes and ears open, and attend to me. How long can we keep in the cover of these woods, and still push on in the direction of the quarters?'

'There's a way roun' de edge o' de swamp, sah, but we'd have to go back a spell to find it.'

'Go on!'

'And dar's moccasins and copperheads lying round here in de trail! Dey don't go for *us* ginerally—but,' he hesitated, 'white men don't stand much show.'

'Good! Then it is as bad for those who are

chasing us, as for me. That will do. Lead on.'

They retraced their steps cautiously, until the negro turned into a lighter by-way. A strange mephitic odour seemed to come from sodden leaves and mosses that began to ooze under their feet. They had picked their way in silence for some minutes; the stunted willows and cypress standing further and further apart, and the openings with clumps of sedge were frequent. Courtland was beginning to fear this exposure of his follower, and had moved up beside him, when suddenly the negro caught his arm, and trembled violently. His lips were parted over his teeth, the whites of his eyes glistened, he seemed gasping and speechless with fear

'What's the matter, Cato?' said Courtland, glancing instinctively at the ground beneath—'Speak, man!—have you been bitten?'

The word seemed to wring an agonised cry from the miserable man.

'Bitten! No; but don't you hear 'em coming, sah! God Almighty! don't you hear dat?'

'What!'

'De dogs! de houns!—*de bloodhouns!* Dey've set 'em loose on me!'

It was true! A faint baying in the distance was now distinctly audible to Courtland. He

knew now plainly the full, cruel purport of the leader's speech, "Those who could go anywhere were tracking their game!'

Every trace of manhood had vanished from the negro's cowering frame. Courtland laid his hand assuringly—appealingly, and then savagely on his shoulder.

'Come! Enough of this! I am here, and will stand by you whatever comes. These dogs are no more to be feared than the others. Rouse yourself, man, and at least help *me* make a fight of it.'

'No! no!' screamed the terrified man. 'Lemme go! Lemme go back to de Massas! Tell 'em I'll come! Tell 'em to call de houns off me, and I'll go quiet! Lemme go!' He struggled violently in his companion's grasp.

In all Courtland's self-control, habits of coolness and discipline, it is to be feared there was still something of the old Berserker temper. His face was white, his eyes blazed in the darkness; only his voice kept that level distinctness which made it for a moment more terrible than even the baying of the tracking hounds to the negro's ear. 'Cato,' he said, 'attempt to run now, and, by God! I'll save the dogs the trouble of grappling your living carcase! Come here! Up that tree with you!'—pointing to a swamp magnolia—'Don't

'NO! NO!' SCREAMED THE TERRIFIED MAN

move as long as I can stand here, and when I'm down—but not till then—save yourself—the best you can.'

He half-helped, half-dragged, the now passive African to the solitary tree; as the bay of a single hound came nearer, the negro convulsively scrambled from Courtland's knee and shoulder to the fork of branches a dozen feet from the ground. Courtland drew his revolver, and, stepping back a few yards into the open, awaited the attack.

It came unexpectedly from behind. A sudden yelp of panting cruelty and frenzied anticipation at Courtland's back, caused him to change front quickly, and the dripping fangs and snaky boa-like neck of a grey weird shadow *passed* him. With an awful supernaturalness of instinct, it kept on in an unerring line to the fateful tree. But that dread directness of scent was Courtland's opportunity. His revolver flashed out in an aim as unerring. The brute, pierced through neck and brain, dashed on against the tree in his impetus, and then rolled over against it in a quivering bulk. Again another bay coming from the same direction told Courtland that his pursuers had outflanked him, and the whole pack were crossing the swamp. But he was prepared; again the same weird shadow, as spectral and monstrous as a dream, dashed out into the brief light of the open, but this time it was stopped, and rolled over convulsively before it had crossed. Flushed, with

the fire of fight in his veins, Courtland turned almost furiously from the fallen brutes at his feet to meet the onset of the more cowardly hunters whom he knew were at his heels. At that moment it would have fared ill with the foremost. No longer the calculating steward and diplomatic manager, no longer the cool-headed arbiter of conflicting interests, he was ready to meet them, not only with the intrepid instincts of a soldier, but with an aroused partisan fury equal to their own. To his surprise no one followed; the baying of a third hound seemed to be silenced and checked; the silence was broken only by the sound of distant disputing voices, and the uneasy trampling of hoofs. This was followed by two or three rifle shots in the distance, but not either in the direction of the quarters nor the Dows' dwelling house. There evidently was some interruption in the pursuit—a diversion of some kind had taken place—but *what* he knew not. He could think of no one who might have interfered on his behalf, and the shouting and wrangling seemed to be carried on in the accents of the one sectional party. He called cautiously to Cato. The negro did not reply. He crossed to the tree and shook it impatiently. Its boughs were empty; Cato was gone! The miserable negro must have taken advantage of the first diversion in his favour to

escape. But where, and how, there was nothing left to indicate.

As Courtland had taken little note of the trail, he had no idea of his own whereabouts. He knew he must return to the fringe of cypress to be able to cross the open field and gain the negro quarters where it was still possible that Cato had fled. Taking a general direction from the few stars visible above the opening, he began to retrace his steps. But he had no longer the negro's woodcraft to guide him. At times his feet were caught in trailing vines which seemed to coil around his ankles with ominous suggestiveness; at times the yielding soil beneath his tread showed his perilous proximity to the swamp, as well as the fact that he was beginning to incline towards that dread circle which is the hopeless instinct of all lost and straying humanity. Luckily the edge of the swamp was more open, and he would be enabled to correct his changed course again by the position of the stars. But he was becoming chilled and exhausted by these fruitless efforts, and at length, after a more devious and prolonged detour, which brought him back to the swamp again, he resolved to skirt its edge in search of some other mode of issuance. Beyond him, the light seemed stronger as of a more extended opening or clearing, and there was even a super-

ficial gleam from the end of the swamp itself, as if from some *ignis fatuus* or the glancing of a pool of unbroken water. A few rods farther brought him to it and a full view of the unencumbered expanse. Beyond him, far across the swamp, he could see a hillside bathed in the moonlight with symmetrical lines of small white squares dotting its slopes and stretching down into a valley of gleaming shafts, pyramids, and tombs. It was the cemetery; the white squares on the hillside were the soldiers' graves. And among them even at that distance, uplifting solemnly, like a reproachful phantom, was the broken shaft above the dust of Chester Brooks.

With the view of that fateful spot which he had not seen since his last meeting there with Sally Dows, a flood of recollection rushed upon him. In the white mist that hung low along the further edge of the swamp he fancied he could see again the battery smoke through which the ghostly figure of the dead rider had charged his gun three years before; in the vapoury white plumes of a funereal plant in the long avenue he was reminded of the light figure of Miss Sally as she appeared at their last meeting. In another moment, in his already dazed condition, he might have succumbed to some sensuous memory of her former fascinations, but he threw it off savagely now, with a

quick and bitter recalling of her deceit and his own weakness. Turning his back upon the scene with a half superstitious tremor, he plunged once more into the trackless covert. But he was conscious that his eyesight was gradually growing dim and his strength failing. He was obliged from time to time to stop and rally his sluggish senses, that seemed to grow heavier under some deadly exhalation that flowed around him. He even seemed to hear familiar voices—but that must be delusion. At last he stumbled. Throwing out an arm to protect himself, he came heavily down upon the ooze, striking a dull, half-elastic root that seemed—it must have been another delusion—to move beneath him, and even—so confused were his senses now—to strike back angrily upon his prostrate arm. A sharp pain ran from his elbow to shoulder and for a moment stung him to full consciousness again. There *were* voices surely—the voices of their former pursuers! If they were seeking to revenge themselves upon him for Cato's escape, he was ready for them. He cocked his revolver and stood erect. A torch flashed through the wood. But even at that moment a film came over his eyes; he staggered and fell.

An interval of helpless semi-consciousness ensued. He felt himself lifted by strong arms and

carried forward, his arm hanging uselessly at his side. The dank odour of the wood was presently exchanged for the free air of the open field; the flaming pine-knot torches were extinguished in the bright moonlight. People pressed around him, but so indistinctly he could not recognise them. All his consciousness seemed centred in the burning, throbbing pain of his arm. He felt himself laid upon the gravel; the sleeve cut from his shoulder, the cool sensation of the hot and bursting skin bared to the night air, and then a soft, cool, and indescribable pressure upon a wound he had not felt before. A voice followed—high, lazily petulant, and familiar to him, and yet one he strove in vain to recall.

'De Lawdy-Gawd save us, Miss Sally! Wot yo' doin' dah? Chile! Chile! Yo'll kill you'self, shuah!'

The pressure continued—strange and potent even through his pain—and was then withdrawn. And a voice that thrilled him said:

'It's the only thing to save him! Hush, ye chattering black crow! Say anything about this to a living soul, and I'll have yo' flogged! Now trot out the whisky bottle and pour it down him.'

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Courtland's eyes opened again, he was in bed in his own room at Redlands, with the vivid morning sun occasionally lighting up the wall whenever the closely-drawn curtains were lightly blown aside by the freshening breeze. The whole events of the night might have been a dream, but for the unsupportable languor which numbed his senses, and the torpor of his arm, that, swollen and discoloured, lay outside the coverlet on a pillow before him. Cloths that had been wrung out in iced water were replaced upon it from time to time by Sophy, Miss Dows's housekeeper, who, seated near his bed-head, was lazily fanning him. Their eyes met.

'Broken?' he said interrogatively, with a faint return of his old deliberate manner, glancing at his helpless arm.

'Deedy no, cun'nle! Snake bite,' responded the negress.

'Snake bite!' repeated Courtland, with languid interest, 'what snake?'

'Moccasin o' copperhead—if you doun know yo'self which,' she replied. 'But it's all right now, honey! De pizen's draw'd out and clean done gone. Wot yer feels now is de whisky. De

SOPHY, MISS DOWS'S HOUSEKEEPER, SEATED NEAR HIS BED-HEAD, WAS LAZILY FANNING HIM

whisky *stays*, sah. It gets into de lubrications of de skin, sah, and has to be absobed.'

Some faint chord of memory was touched by the girl's peculiar vocabulary.

'Ah, said Courtland quickly, 'you're Miss Dows's Sophy. Then you can tell me——'

'Nuffin, sah! absomlutely nuffin!' interrupted the girl, shaking her head with impressive official dignity. 'It's done gone fo'bid by de doctor! Yo're to lie dar and shut yo're eye, honey,' she added, for the moment reverting unconsciously to the native maternal tenderness of her race, 'and yo're not to bodder yo'self ef school keeps o' not. De medical man say distinctly, sah,' she concluded, sternly recalling her duty again, 'no conversation wid de patient.'

But Courtland had winning ways with all dependents. 'But you will answer me *one* question, Sophy, and I'll not ask another. Has'—he hesitated, in his still uncertainty as to the actuality of his experience and its probable extent —'has—Cato—escaped?'

'If yo' mean dat sassy, bull-nigger oberseer ob yo'se, cun'nle, *he's* safe, yo' bet!' returned Sophy, sharply. 'Safe in his own quo'tahs night afo' las', after braggin' about the blood-haowns he killed; and safe ober the county line yes'day moan'in, after kicking up all dis rumpus. If dar is a sassy, high falutin' nigger I jiss 'spises—it's dat black nigger Cato o' yo'se! Now,'—relenting—'yo'

jiss wink yo' eye, honey, and don't excite yo self about sach black trash; drap off to sleep comforble. Fo' yo do'an get annuder word out o' Sophy, shuah!'

As if in obedience, Courtland closed his eyes. But even in his weak state he was conscious of the blood coming into his cheek at Sophy's relentless criticism of the man for whom he had just perilled his life and position. Much of it he felt was true; but how far had he been a dupe in his Quixotic defence of a quarrelsome blusterer and cowardly bully? Yet there was the unmistakable shot and cold-blooded attempt at Cato's assassination! And there were the bloodhounds sent to track the unfortunate man! That was no dream—but a brutal inexcusable fact!

The medical practitioner of Redlands he remembered was conservative, old-fashioned, and diplomatic. But his sympathies had been broadened by some army experiences, and Courtland trusted to some soldierly and frank exposition of the matter from him. Nevertheless, Dr. Maynard was first healer, and, like Sophy, professionally cautious. "The Colonel had better not talk about it now. It was already two days old; the Colonel had been nearly forty-eight hours in bed. It was a regrettable affair, but the natural climax of long-continued political and racial irritation—and not without *great*

provocation! Assassination was a strong word; could Colonel Courtland swear that Cato was actually *aimed at*, or was it not merely a demonstration to frighten a bullying negro? It might have been necessary to teach him a lesson—which the Colonel by this time ought to know could only be taught to these inferior races by *fear*. The bloodhounds! Ah, yes!—well, the bloodhounds were, in fact, only a part of that wholesome discipline. Surely Colonel Courtland was not so foolish as to believe that, even in the old slave-holding days, planters sent dogs after runaways to mangle and destroy *their own property*? They might as well, at once, let them escape! No, sir! They were used only to frighten and drive the niggers out of swamps, brakes, and hiding-places—as no nigger had ever dared to face 'em. Cato might lie as much as he liked, but everybody knew *who* it was that killed Major Reed's hounds. Nobody blamed the Colonel for it—not even Major Reed—but if the Colonel had lived a little longer in the South he'd have known it wasn't necessary to do that in self-preservation, as the hounds would never have gone for a white man. But that was not a matter for the Colonel to bother about *now*. He was doing well; he had slept nearly thirty hours; there was no fever, he must continue to doze off the exhaustion of his powerful stimulant, and

he, the doctor, would return later in the afternoon.

Perhaps it was his very inability to grasp in that exhausted state the full comprehension of the doctor's meaning, perhaps because the physical benumbing of his brain was stronger than any mental excitement, but he slept again until the doctor reappeared. 'You're doing well enough now, Colonel,' said the physician, after a brief examination of his patient, 'and I think we can afford to wake you up a bit, and even let you move your arm. You're luckier than poor Jo Higbee, who won't be able to set his leg to the floor for three weeks to come. I haven't got all the buck-shot out of it yet that Jack Dumont put there the other night.'

Courtland started slightly. Jack Dumont! That was the name of Sally Dows's cousin of whom Champney had spoken! He had resolutely put aside from his returning memory the hazy recollection of the young girl's voice—the last thing he had heard that night—and the mystery that seemed to surround it. But there was no delusion in this cousin—his rival; and that of the equally deceived Champney. He controlled himself and repeated coldly:

'Jack Dumont!'

'Yes. But of course you knew nothing of all

that, while you were off in the swamp there. Yet, by Jingo! it was Dumont's shooting Higbee that helped *you* to get off your nigger, a darned sight more than *your* killing the dogs.'

'I don't understand,' returned Courtland coldly.

'Well, you see, Dumont, who had taken up No'th'n principles, I reckon, more to goad the Higbees and please Sally Dows than from any conviction, came over here that night. Whether he suspected anything was up, or wanted to dare Higbee for bedevilment, or was only dancing attendance on Miss Sally, no one knows. But he rode slap into Higbee's party, called out "If you're out hunting, Jo, here's a chance for your score!' meaning their old *vendetta* feud, and brings his shot-gun up to his shoulder. Higbee wasn't quick enough, Dumont lets fly, drops Higbee, and then gallops off chased by the Reeds to avenge Higbee, and followed by the whole crowd to see the fun, which was a little better than nigger-driving. And that let you and Cato out, colonel.'

'And Dumont?'

'Got clean away to Foxboro' Station, leaving another score on his side for the Reeds and Higbees to wipe out as best they can. You No'th'n men don't believe in these sort of things,

colonel, but taken as a straight dash and bit o' raiding, that stroke of Sally Dows's cousin was mighty fine!'

Courtland controlled himself with difficulty. The doctor had spoken truly. The hero of this miserable affair was *her* cousin—*his rival*! And to him—perhaps influenced by some pitying appeal of Miss Sally for the man she had deceived—Courtland owed his life! He instinctively drew a quick, sharp breath.

'Are you in pain?'

'Not at all. When can I get up?'

'Perhaps to-morrow.'

'And this arm?'

'Better not use it for a week or two.' He stopped, and, glancing paternally at the younger man, added gravely but kindly: 'If you'll take my unprofessional advice, Colonel Courtland, you'll let this matter simmer down. It won't hurt you and your affairs here that folks have had a taste of your quality, and the nigger a lesson that his fellows won't forget.'

'I thank you,' returned Courtland coldly; 'but I think I already understand my duty to the company I represent and the Government I have served.'

'Possibly, colonel,' said the doctor quietly; 'but you'll let an older man remind you and the

Government that you can't change the habits or relations of two distinct races in a few years. Your friend, Miss Sally Dows — although not quite in my way of thinking — has never attempted *that*.'

'I am fully aware that Miss Dows possesses diplomatic accomplishments and graces that I cannot lay claim to,' returned Courtland *bitterly*.

The doctor lifted his eyebrows slightly, and changed the subject.

When he had gone, Courtland called for writing materials. He had already made up his mind, and one course alone seemed proper to him. He wrote to the president of the company, detailing the circumstances that had just occurred, admitting the

'IF YOU'LL TAKE MY UNPROFESSIONAL ADVICE, COLONEL COURTLAND, YOU'LL LET THIS MATTER SIMMER DOWN'

alleged provocation given by his overseer, but pointing out the terrorism of a mob-law, which rendered his own discipline impossible. He asked that the matter be reported to Washington, and some measures taken for the protection of the freedmen. In the meantime he begged to tender his own resignation, but he would stay until his successor was appointed, or the safety of his *employés* secured. Until then, he should act upon his own responsibility, and according to his judgment. He made no personal charges, mentioned no names, asked for no exemplary prosecution or trial of the offenders, but only demanded a safeguard against a repetition of the offence. His next letter, although less formal and official, was more difficult. It was addressed to the Commandant of the nearest Federal barracks, who was an old friend and former companion-in-arms. He alluded to some conversation they had previously exchanged in regard to the presence of a small detachment of troops at Redlands during the elections, which Courtland at the time, however, had diplomatically opposed. He suggested it now as a matter of public expediency and prevention. When he had sealed the letters, not caring to expose them to the espionage of the local postmaster or his ordinary servants, he entrusted them to one of Miss Sally's own henchmen, to be posted

at the next office, at Bitter Creek Station, ten miles distant.

Unfortunately, this duty acccomplished, the reaction consequent on his still weak physical condition threw him back upon himself and his memory. He had resolutely refused to think of Miss Sally; he had been able to withstand the suggestions of her in the presence of her handmaid—supposed to be potent in nursing and herb-lore—whom she had detached to wait upon him, and he had returned politely formal acknowledgments to her inquiries. He had determined to continue this personal avoidance as far as possible until he was relieved, on the ground of that *business* expediency which these events had made necessary. She would see that he was only accepting the arguments with which she had met his previous advances. Briefly, he had recourse to that hopeless logic by which a man proves to himself that he has no reason for loving a certain woman, and is as incontestably convinced by the same process that he has. And in the midst of it he weakly fell asleep, and dreamed that he and Miss Sally were walking in the cemetery; that a hideous snake concealed among some lilies, over which the young girl was bending, had uplifted its triangular head to strike. That he seized it by the neck, struggled with it until he was nearly

exhausted, when it suddenly collapsed and shrunk, leaving in his palm the limp, crushed, and delicately perfumed little thread glove which he remembered to have once slipped from her hand.

When he awoke, that perfume seemed to be still in the air, distinct from the fresh but homelier scents of the garden which stole through the window. A sense of delicious coolness came with the afternoon breeze, that faintly trilled the slanting slats of the blind with a slumberous humming as of bees. The golden glory of a sinking southern sun was pencilling the cheap paper on the wall with leafy tracery and glowing arabesques. But more than that, the calm of some potent influence—or some unseen presence—was upon him, which he feared a movement might dispel. The chair at the foot of his bed was empty. Sophy had gone out. He did not turn his head to look further; his languid eyes falling aimlessly upon the carpet at his bedside suddenly dilated. For they fell also on the 'smallest foot in the State.'

He started to his elbow, but a soft hand was laid gently yet firmly upon his shoulder, and with a faint rustle of muslin skirts Miss Sally rose from an unseen chair at the head of his bed, and stood beside him.

'Don't stir, co'nnle, I didn't sit where I could

look in yo're face for fear of waking yo'. But I'll change seats now.' She moved to the chair which Sophy had vacated, drew it slightly nearer the bed, and sat down.

'It was very kind of you—to come,' said Courtland, hesitatingly, as with a strong effort he drew his eyes away from the fascinating vision, and regained a certain cold composure, 'but I am afraid my illness has been greatly magnified. I really am quite well enough to be up and about my business, if the doctor would permit it. But I shall certainly manage to attend to my duty to-morrow, and I hope to be at your service.'

'Meaning that yo' don't care to see me *now*, co'nnle,' she said lightly, with a faint twinkle in her wise, sweet eyes. 'I thought of that, but, as my business wouldn't wait, I brought it to you.' She took from the folds of her gown a letter. To his utter amazement it was the one he had given his overseer to post to the Commandant that morning. To his greater indignation the seal was broken.

'Who has dared?' he demanded, half rising.

Her little hand was thrust out half deprecatingly. 'No one yo' can fight, co'nnle; only *me*. I don't generally open other folks' letters, and I wouldn't have done it for *myself*; I did for yo'.'

'For me?'

'For yo'. I reckoned what yo' *might* do, and I told Sam to bring *me* the letters first. I didn't mind what yo' wrote to the company—for they'll take care of yo', and their own eggs are all in the same basket. I didn't open *that* one, but I did *this* when I saw the address. It was as I expected, and yo'd given yo'self away! For if yo' had those soldiers down here, yo'll have a row, sure! Don't move, co'nnle, *yo'* may not care for that, it's in *yo'r* line. But folks will say that the soldiers weren't sent to prevent *rioting*, but that Co'nnle Courtland was using his old comrades to keep order on his property at Gov'ment expense. Hol' on! 'Hol' on! co'nnle,' said the little figure, rising and waving its pretty arms with a mischievous simulation of terrified deprecation. 'Don't shoot! Of course yo' didn't mean *that*, but that's about the way that So'th'n men will put it to yo'r Gov'ment. For,' she continued, more gently, yet with the shrewdest twinkle in her grey eyes, 'if yo' really thought the niggers might need Federal protection, yo'ld have let *me* write to the Commandant to send an escort—not to *yo'*, but to *Cato*—that *he* might be able to come back in safety. Yo'ld have had yo'r soldiers; I'd have had back my nigger, which' (demurely) 'yo' don't seem to worry yo'self much about, co'nnle; and there isn't a So'th'n man would have objected.

But,' still more demurely, and affectedly smoothing out her crisp skirt with her little hands, 'yo' havn't been troubling me much with yo'r counsel lately.'

A swift and utterly new comprehension swept over Courtland. For the first time in his knowledge of her he suddenly grasped what was, perhaps, the true conception of her character. Looking at her clearly now, he understood the meaning of those pliant graces, so unaffected and yet always controlled by the reasoning of an unbiassed intellect; her frank speech, and plausible intonations! Before him stood the true-born daughter of a long race of politicians! All that he had heard of their dexterity, tact, and expediency rose here incarnate, with the added grace of womanhood. A strange sense of relief—perhaps a dawning of hope—stole over him.

'But how will this ensure Cato's safety hereafter, or give protection to the others?' he said, fixing his eyes upon her.

'The future won't concern *yo'* much, co'nnle, if as yo' say here yo'r resignation is sent in, and yo'r successor appointed,' she replied, with more gravity than she had previously shown.

'But you do not think I will leave *you* in this uncertainty,' he said passionately. He stopped suddenly, his brow darkened. 'I forgot,' he added

coldly—'you will be well protected. Your—*cousin*—will give you the counsel of race—and—closer ties.'

To his infinite astonishment, Miss Sally leaned forward in her chair and buried her laughing face in both of her hands. When her dimples had become again visible, she said with an effort, 'Don't yo' think, co'nnle, that as a peace-maker my cousin was even a bigger failure than yo'self?'

'I don't understand,' stammered Courtland.

'Don't yo' think,' she continued, wiping her eyes demurely, 'that if a young woman about my size, who had got perfectly tired and sick of all this fuss made about *yo'*, because yo' were a No'th'n man, managing niggers—if that young woman wanted to show her people what sort of a radical and abolitionist a *So'th'n* man of their own sort might become, she'd have sent for Jack Dumont as a sample? Eh? Only, I declare to goodness, *I* never reckoned that he and Higbee would revive the tomfooling of the *vendetta*, and take to shootin' each other at once.'

'And your sending for your cousin was only a feint to protect me?' said Courtland faintly.

'Perhaps he didn't have to be *sent for* co'nnle,' she said, with a slight touch of coquetry 'Suppose we say, I *let him come*... He'd be hanging round, for he has property here, and wanted

to get me to take it up with mine in the company. I knew what his new views and ideas were, and I thought I'd better consult Champney—who, being a foreigner, and an older resident than yo', was quite neutral. He didn't happen to tell *yo'* anything about it—did he, co'nnle?' she added with a grave mouth, but an indescribable twinkle in her eyes.

Courtland's face darkened. 'He did—and he further told me, Miss Dows, that he himself was your suitor, and that you had refused him because of the objections of your people.'

She raised her eyes to his swiftly and dropped them.

'And you think I ought to have accepted him?' she said, slowly.

'No! but—you know—you told me——' he began hurriedly. But she had already risen, and was shaking out the folds of her dress.

'We're not talking *business*, co'nnle—and business was my only excuse for coming here, and taking Sophy's place. I'll send her in to yo', now.'

'But, Miss Dows!—Miss Sally!'

She stopped—hesitated—a singular weakness for so self-contained a nature—and then slowly produced from her pocket a second letter—the one that Courtland had directed to the company. 'I didn't read *this* letter, as I just told yo,' co'nnle, for I reckon I know what's in it, but I thought I'd

bring it with me too, in case *yo' changed yo'r mind.*'

He raised himself on his pillow as she turned quickly away; but in that single vanishing glimpse of her bright face he saw what neither he nor any one else had ever seen upon the face of Sally Dows—a burning blush!

SHE STOPPED — HESITATED — A SINGULAR WEAKNESS FOR SO SELF-CONTAINED A NATURE

'Miss Sally!' He almost leaped from the bed, but she was gone. There was another rustle at the door—the entrance of Sophy.

'Call her back, Sophy, quick!' he said.

The negress shook her turbaned head. 'Not much, honey! When Miss Sally say she goes—she done gone, shuah!'

'But, Sophy!' Perhaps something in the significant face of the girl tempted him; perhaps it was only an impulse of his forgotten youth. 'Sophy!' appealingly—'tell me!—is Miss Sally engaged to her cousin?'

'Wat dat?' said Sophy, in indignant scorn. 'Miss Sally engaged to dat Dumont! What fo'? Yo'r crazy! No!'

'Nor Champney? Tell me, Sophy, has she a *lover*?'

For a moment the whites of Sophy's eyes were uplifted in speechless scorn. 'Yo' ask dat! Yo' lyin' dar wid dat snake-bit arm! Yo' lyin' dar, and Miss Sally—who has only to whistle to call de fust quality in de State raoun her—coming and going here wid you, and trotting on yo'r arrants—and yo' ask dat! Yes! she has a lover, and what's mo,' she *can't help it*; and yo're her lover; and what's mo,' *yo'* can't help it either! And yo' can't back out of it now—bofe of yo'—nebber! Fo' yo're hers, and she's yo'res—fo' ebber. For she sucked yo' blood.'

'What!' gasped Courtland, aghast at what he believed to be the sudden insanity of the negress.

'Yes! Whar's yo' eyes? whar's yo' years? who's yo' dat yo' didn't see nor heah nuffin? When dey dragged yo' outer de swamp dat night—wid de snake-bite fresh on yo' arm—didn't *she*, dat poh

chile!—dat same Miss Sally—frow herself down on yo,' and put dat baby mouf of hers to de wound and suck out de pizen and sabe de life ob yo' at de risk ob her own? Say? And if dey's any troof in Hoodoo, don't dat make yo' one blood and one soul! Go way, white man! I'm sick of yo'. Stop dar! Lie down dar! Hol' on, co'nnle, for massy's sake. Well, dar—I'll call her back!'

And she did!

'Look here—don't you know—it rather took me by surprise,' said Champney, a few days later, with a hearty grip of the Colonel's uninjured hand—'but I don't bear malice, old fellow, and, by Jove! it was *such* a sensible, all-round, business-like choice for the girl to make that no wonder we never thought of it before. Hang it all, you see a fellow was always so certain it would be something out of the way and detrimental, don't you know, that would take the fancy of a girl like that—somebody like that cousin of hers or Higbee, or even *me*, by Jove! that we never thought of looking beyond our noses—never thought of the *business*! And *you*, all the time so cold and silent and matter-of-fact about it! But I congratulate you! You've got the business down on a safe basis now, and what's more, you've got the one woman who can run it.'

They say he was a true prophet. At least the Syndicate affairs prospered, and in course of time even the Reeds and the Higbees participated in the benefits. There were no more racial disturbances; only the districts polled a peaceful and *smaller* Democratic majority at the next election. There were not wanting those who alleged that Colonel Courtland had simply become *Mrs. Courtland's superintendent*; that she had absorbed him as she had every one who had come under her influence, and that she would not rest until she had made him a Senator (to represent Mrs. Courtland) in the councils of the nation. But when I last dined with them in Washington, ten years ago, I found them both very happy and comfortable, and I remember that Mrs. Courtland's remarks upon Federal and State interests, the proper education of young girls, and the management of the family, were eminently wise and practical.

THE CONSPIRACY OF MRS. BUNKER

PART I

On the northerly shore of San Francisco Bay a line of bluffs terminates in a promontory, at whose base, formed by the crumbling *débris* of the cliff above, there is a narrow stretch of beach, salt meadow, and scrub oak. The abrupt wall of rock behind it seems to isolate it as completely from the mainland as the sea before it separates it from the opposite shore. In spite of its contiguity to San Francisco—opposite also, but hidden by the sharp re-entering curve of coast—the locality was wild, uncultivated, and unfrequented. A solitary fisherman's cabin half-hidden in the rocks was the only trace of habitation. White drifts of sea-gulls and pelican across the face of the cliff, grey clouds of sandpipers rising from the beach, the dripping flight of ducks over the salt meadows, and the occasional splash of a seal from the rocks, were the only signs of life that could be seen from the decks of passing ships. And yet the fisherman's

cabin was occupied by Zephas Bunker and his young wife, and he had succeeded in wresting from the hard soil pasturage for a cow and goats, while his lateen-sailed fishing-boat occasionally rode quietly in the sheltered cove below.

Three years ago Zephas Bunker, an ex-whaler, had found himself stranded on a San Francisco wharf and had 'hired out' to a small Petaluma farmer. At the end of a year, he had acquired little taste for the farmer's business, but considerable for the farmer's youthful daughter, who, equally weary of small agriculture, had consented to elope with him in order to escape it. They were married at Oakland; he put his scant earnings into a fishing-boat, discovered the site for his cabin, and brought his bride thither. The novelty of the change pleased her, although perhaps it was but little advance on her previous humble position. Yet she preferred her present freedom to the bare restricted home life of her past; the perpetual presence of the restless sea was a relief to the old monotony of the wheat field and its isolated drudgery. For Mary's youthful fancy, thinly sustained in childhood by the lightest literary food, had neither been stimulated nor disillusioned by her marriage. That practical experience which is usually the end of girlish romance had left her still a child in sentiment.

The long absences of her husband in his fishing-boat kept her from wearying of or even knowing his older and unequal *companionship*; *it* gave her a freedom her girlhood had never known, yet added a protection that suited her still childish dependency, while it tickled her pride with its equality. When not engaged in her easy household duties in her three-roomed cottage, or the care of her rocky garden patch, she found time enough to indulge her fancy over the mysterious haze that wrapped the invisible city so near and yet unknown to her; in the sails that slipped in and out of the Golden Gate, but of whose destination she knew nothing; and in the long

SHE FOUND TIME TO INDULGE HER FANCY

smoke trail of the mail steamer which had yet brought her no message. Like all dwellers by the sea, her face and her thoughts were more frequently turned towards it; and as with them, it also seemed to her that whatever change was coming into her life would come across that vast unknown expanse. But it was here that Mrs. Bunker was mistaken.

It had been a sparkling summer morning. The waves were running before the dry North-west Trade winds with crystalline but colourless brilliancy. Sheltered by the high, northerly bluff, the house and its garden were exposed to the untempered heat of the cloudless sun refracted from the rocky wall behind it. Some tarpaulin and ropes lying among the rocks were sticky and odorous; the scrub oaks and manzanita bushes gave out the aroma of baking wood; occasionally a faint *pot-pourri* fragrance from the hot wild roses and beach grass was blown along the shore; even the lingering odours of Bunker's vocation, and of Mrs. Bunker's cooking, were idealised and refined by the saline breath of the sea at the doors and windows. Mrs. Bunker, in the dazzling sun, bending over her peas and lettuces with a small hoe, felt the comfort of her brown holland sun-bonnet. Secure in her isolation, she unbuttoned the neck of her gown for air, and did not put up the strand of

black hair that had escaped over her shoulder. It was very hot in the lee of the bluff, and very quiet in that still air. So quiet that she heard two distinct reports, following each other quickly, but very faint and far. She glanced mechanically towards the sea. Two merchantmen in midstream were shaking out their wings for a long flight, a pilot boat and coasting schooner were rounding the point, but there was no smoke from their decks. She bent over her work again, and in another moment had forgotten it. But the heat, with the dazzling reflection from the cliff, forced her to suspend her gardening, and stroll

SHE GLANCED TOWARDS THE SEA

along the beach to the extreme limit of her domain. Here she looked after the cow, that had also strayed away through the tangled bush for coolness. The goats, impervious to temperature, were basking in inaccessible fastnesses on the cliff itself that made her eyes ache to climb. Over an hour passed, she was returning, and had neared her house, when she was suddenly startled to see the figure of a man between her and the cliff. He was engaged in brushing his dusty clothes with a handkerchief, and although he saw her coming, and even moved slowly towards her, continued his occupation with a half-impatient, half-abstracted air. Her feminine perception was struck with the circumstance that he was in deep black, with scarcely a gleam of white showing even at his throat, and that he wore a tall black

BRUSHING HIS DUSTY CLOTHES

hat. Without knowing anything of social customs, it seemed to her that his dress was inconsistent with his appearance there.

'Good morning,' he said, lifting his hat with a preoccupied air. 'Do you live here?'

'Yes,' she said wonderingly.

'Anybody else?'

'My husband.'

'I mean any other people? Are there any other houses?' he said with a slight impatience.

'No.'

He looked at her and then towards the sea. 'I expect some friends who are coming for me in a boat. I suppose they can land easily here?'

'Didn't you yourself land here just now?' she said quickly.

He half hesitated, and then, as if scorning an equivocation, made a hasty gesture over her shoulder and said bluntly, 'No, I came over the cliff.'

'Down the cliff?' she repeated incredulously.

'Yes,' he said, glancing at his clothes, 'it was a rough scramble, but the goats showed me the way.'

'And you were up on the bluff all the time?' she went on curiously.

'Yes. You see—I——,' he stopped suddenly at what seemed to be the beginning of a pre-

arranged and plausible explanation, as if impatient of its weakness or hypocrisy, and said briefly: 'Yes—I was there.'

Like most women, more observant of his face and figure, she did not miss this lack of explanation. He was a very good-looking man of middle age, with a thin, proud, high-bred face, which in a country of bearded men had the further distinction of being smoothly shaven. She had never seen anyone like him before. She thought he looked like an illustration of some novel she had read, but also somewhat melancholy, worn, and tired.

'Won't you come in and rest yourself?' she said, motioning to the cabin.

'Thank you,' he said, still half absently. 'Perhaps I'd better. It may be some time yet before they come.'

She led the way to the cabin, entered the living room—a plainly furnished little apartment between the bedroom and the kitchen—pointed to a large bamboo armchair, and placed a bottle of whisky and some water on the table before him. He thanked her again very gently, poured out some spirits in his glass, and mixed it with water. But when she glanced towards him again he had apparently risen without tasting it, and going to the door was standing there with his hand in the breast of his buttoned frock coat, gazing silently

towards the sea. There was something vaguely historical in his attitude—or what she thought might be historical—as of somebody of great importance who had halted on the eve of some great event at the door of her humble cabin.

His apparent unconsciousness of her and of his surroundings, his pre-occupation with something far beyond her ken, far from piquing her, only excited her interest the more. And then there was such an odd sadness in his eyes.

'Are you anxious for your folks coming?' she said at last, following his outlook.

'I—oh no!' he returned, quickly recalling himself, 'they'll be sure to come—sooner or later. No fear of that,' he added half smilingly, half wearily.

Mrs. Bunker passed into the kitchen, where, while apparently attending to her household duties, she could still observe her singular guest. Left alone, he seated himself mechanically in the chair, and gazed fixedly at the fireplace. He remained a long time so quiet and unmoved, in spite of the marked ostentatious clatter Mrs. Bunker found it necessary to make with her dishes, that an odd fancy that he was scarcely a human visitant began to take possession of her. Yet she was not frightened. She remembered distinctly afterwards that, far from having any concern for herself, she

was only moved by a strange and vague admiration of him.

But her prolonged scrutiny was not without effect. Suddenly he raised his dark eyes, and

THERE WAS SOMETHING VAGUELY HISTORICAL IN HIS ATTITUDE

she felt them pierce the obscurity of her kitchen with a quick, suspicious, impatient penetration, which as they met hers gave way, however, to a look that she thought was gently reproachful.

Then he rose, stretched himself to his full height, and approaching the kitchen door leaned listlessly against the door-post.

'I don't suppose you are ever lonely here?'

'No, sir.'

'Of course not. You have yourself and husband. Nobody interferes with you. You are contented and happy together.'

Mrs. Bunker did not say, what was the fact, that she had never before connected the sole companionship of her husband with her happiness. Perhaps it had never occurred to her until that moment how little it had to do with it. She only smiled gratefully at the change in her guest's abstraction.

'Do you often go to San Francisco?' he continued.

'I have never been there at all. Some day I expect we will go there to live.'

'I wouldn't advise you to,' he said, looking at her gravely. 'I don't think it will pay you. You'll never be happy there as here. You'll never have the independence and freedom you have here. You'll never be your own mistress again. But how does it happen you never were in San Francisco?' he said suddenly.

If he would not talk of himself, here at least was a chance for Mrs. Bunker to say something.

She related how her family had emigrated from Kansas across the plains and had taken up a 'location' at Contra Costa. How she didn't care for it, and how she came to marry the seafaring man who brought her here—all with great simplicity and frankness and as unreservedly as to a superior being—albeit his attention wandered at times, and a rare but melancholy smile that he had apparently evoked to meet her conversational advances became fixed occasionally. Even his dark eyes, which had obliged Mrs. Bunker to put up her hair, and button her collar, rested upon her without seeing her.

'Then your husband's name is Bunker?' he said when she paused at last. 'That's one of those Nantucket Quaker names—sailors and whalers for generations—and yours, you say, was MacEwan. Well, Mrs. Bunker, *your* family came from Kentucky to Kansas only lately, though I suppose your father calls himself a Free-States man. You ought to know something of farming and cattle, for your ancestors were old Scotch Covenanters who emigrated a hundred years ago, and were great stock raisers.'

All this seemed only the natural omniscience of a superior being. And Mrs. Bunker perhaps was not pained to learn that her husband's family was of a lower degree than her own. But the

stranger's knowledge did not end there. He talked of her husband's business—he explained the vast fishing resources of the bay and coast. He showed her how the large colony of Italian fishermen were inimical to the interests of California and to her husband—particularly as a native American trader. He told her of the volcanic changes of the bay and coast line, of the formation of the rocky ledge on which she lived. He pointed out to her its value to the Government for defensive purposes, and how it naturally commanded the entrance of the Golden Gate far better than Fort Point, and that it ought to be in its hands. If the Federal Government did not buy it of her husband, certainly the State of California should. And here he fell into an abstraction as deep and as gloomy as before. He walked to the window, paced the floor with his hand in his breast, went to the door, and finally stepped out of the cabin, moving along the ledge of rocks to the shore, where he stood motionless.

Mrs. Bunker had listened to him with parted lips and eyes of eloquent admiration. She had never before heard anyone talk like *that*—she had not believed it possible that anyone could have such knowledge. Perhaps she could not understand all he said, but she would try to remember it after he had gone. She could only think now

how kind it was of him that in all this mystery of his coming, and in the singular sadness that was oppressing him, he should try to interest her. And thus looking at him, and wondering, an idea came to her.

She went into her bedroom and took down her husband's heavy pilot overcoat and sou'-wester, and handed them to her guest.

'You'd better put them on if you're going to stand there,' she said.

'But I am not cold,' he said, wonderingly.

'But you might be *seen*,' she said simply.

It was the first suggestion that had passed between them that his presence there was a secret. He looked at her intently, then he smiled and said, 'I think you're right, for many reasons,' put the pilot coat over his frock coat, removed his hat with the gesture of a bow, handed it to her, and placed the sou'-wester in its stead. Then for an instant he hesitated as if about to speak, but Mrs. Bunker, with a delicacy that she could not herself comprehend at the moment, hurried back to the cabin without giving him an opportunity.

Nor did she again intrude upon his meditations. Hidden in his disguise, which to her eyes did not, however, seem to conceal his characteristic figure, he wandered for nearly an hour under the bluff and along the shore, returning at last almost

mechanically to the cabin, where, oblivious of his surroundings, he reseated himself in silence by the table with his cheek resting on his hand.

'YOU'D BETTER PUT THEM ON'

Presently, her quick, experienced ear detected the sound of oars in their rowlocks; she could plainly see from her kitchen window a small boat with two

strangers seated at the stern being pulled to the shore. With the same strange instinct of delicacy, she determined not to go out lest her presence might embarrass her guest's reception of his friends. But as she turned towards the living room she found he had already risen and was removing his hat and pilot coat. She was struck, however, by the circumstance that not only did he exhibit no feeling of relief at his deliverance, but that a half cynical, half savage expression had taken the place of his former melancholy. As he went to the door, the two gentlemen hastily clambered up the rocks to greet him.

'Jim reckoned it was you hangin' round the rocks, but I couldn't tell at that distance. Seemed you borrowed a hat and coat. Well—it's all fixed, and we've no time to lose. There's a coasting steamer just dropping down below the Heads, and it will take you aboard. But I can tell you you've kicked up a h—ll of a row over there.' He stopped, evidently at some sign from her guest. The rest of the man's speech followed in a hurried whisper, which was stopped again by the voice she knew. 'No. Certainly not.' The next moment his tall figure was darkening the door of the kitchen; his hand was outstretched. 'Good-bye, Mrs. Bunker, and many thanks for your hospitality. My friends here,' he turned grimly

to the men behind him, 'think I ought to ask you to keep this a secret even from your husband. *I don't!* They also think that I ought to offer you money for your kindness. *I don't.* But if you will honour me by keeping this ring in remembrance of it'—he took a heavy seal ring from his finger—'it's the only bit of jewelry I have about me—I'll be very glad. Good-bye!' She felt for a moment the firm, soft pressure of his long, thin fingers around her own, and then—he was gone. The sound of retreating oars grew fainter and fainter and was lost. The same reserve of delicacy which now appeared to her as a duty kept her from going to the window to watch the destination of the boat. No, he should go as he came, without her supervision or knowledge.

Nor did she feel lonely afterwards. On the contrary, the silence and solitude of the isolated domain had a new charm. They kept the memory of her experience intact, and enabled her to refill it with his presence. She could see his tall figure again pausing before her cabin, without the incongruous association of another personality; she could hear his voice again, unmingled with one more familiar. For the first time, the regular absence of her husband seemed an essential good fortune instead of an accident of their life. For the experience belonged to *her*, and not to him

and her together. He could not understand it; he would have acted differently and spoiled it. She should not tell him anything of it, in spite of the stranger's suggestion, which, of course, he had only made because he didn't know Zephas as well as she did. For Mrs. Bunker was getting on rapidly; it was her first admission of the conjugal knowledge that one's husband is inferior to the outside estimate of him. The next step—the belief that he was deceiving *her* as he was *them*—would be comparatively easy.

'HONOUR ME BY KEEPING THIS RING'

Nor should she show him the ring. The stranger had certainly never said anything about that! It was a heavy ring, with a helmeted head carved on its red cornelian stone, and what looked like strange letters around it. It fitted her third finger per-

fectly; but *his* fingers were small, and he had taken it from his little finger. She should keep it herself. Of course, if it had been money, she would have given it to Zephas; but the stranger knew that she wouldn't take money. How firmly he had said that 'I don't!'. She felt the warm blood fly to her fresh young face at the thought of it. He had understood her. She might be living in a poor cabin, doing all the housework herself, and her husband only a fisherman, but he had treated her like a lady.

And so the afternoon passed. The outlying fog began to roll in at the Golden Gate, obliterating the headland and stretching a fleecy bar across the channel as if shutting out from vulgar eyes the way that he had gone. Night fell, but Zephas had not yet come. This was unusual, for he was generally as regular as the afternoon 'trades' which blew him there. There was nothing to detain him in this weather and at this season. She began to be vaguely uneasy; then a little angry at this new development of his incompatibility. Then it occurred to her, for the first time in her wifehood, to think what she would do if he were lost. Yet, in spite of some pain, terror, and perplexity at the possibility, her dominant thought was that she would be a free woman to order her life as she liked.

It was after ten before his lateen sail flapped in the little cove. She was waiting to receive him on the shore. His good-humoured hirsute face was slightly apologetic in expression, but flushed and disturbed with some new excitement, to which an extra glass or two of spirits had apparently added intensity. The contrast between his evident indulgence and the previous abstemiousness of her late guest struck her unpleasantly. 'Well — I declare,' she said indignantly, 'so *that's* what kept you!'

'THERE'S BEEN AWFUL TIMES OVER IN 'FRISCO'

'No,' he said quickly—'there's been awful times over in 'Frisco! Everybody just wild, and the Vigilance Committee in session. Jo Henderson's killed! Shot by Wynyard Marion in a duel!

He'll be lynched, sure as a gun, if they ketch him.'

'But I thought men who fought duels always went free.'

'Yes, but this ain't no common duel; they say the whole thing was planned beforehand by them Southern fire-eaters to get rid o' Henderson because he's a Northern man and Anti-Slavery, and that they picked out Colonel Marion to do it because he was a dead shot. They got him to insult Henderson, so he was bound to challenge Marion, and that giv' Marion the chyce of weppings. It was a reg'lar put-up job to kill him.'

'And what's all this to do with you?' she asked, with irritation.

'Hold on, won't you! and I'll tell you. I was pickin' up nets off Sancelito about noon, when I was hailed by one of them Vigilance tugs, and they set me to stand off and on the shore and watch that Marion didn't get away, while they were scoutin' inland. Ye see *the duel took place just over the bluff there—behind ye*—and they allowed that Marion had struck away North for Mendocino to take ship there. For after overhaulin' his second's boat, they found out that they had come away from Sancelito *alone*. But they sent a tug around by sea to Mendocino to head him off there, while they're closin' in around him,

inland. They're bound to catch him sooner or later. But you ain't listenin', Mollie?'

She was—in every fibre—but with her head turned towards the window, and the invisible Golden Gate through which the fugitive had

SHE SAW IT ALL NOW—THAT GLORIOUS VISION

escaped. For she saw it all now—that glorious vision—her high-bred, handsome guest and Wynyard Marion were one and the same person. And this rough, commonplace man before her—her own husband—had been basely set to capture him!

PART II

DURING that evening and the next Mrs. Bunker, without betraying her secret, or exciting the least suspicion on the part of her husband, managed to extract from him not only a rough description of Marion which tallied with her own impressions, but a short history of his career. He was a famous politician who had held high office in the South; he was an accomplished lawyer; he had served in the army; he was a fiery speaker; he had a singular command of men. He was unmarried, but there were queer stories of his relations with some of the wives of prominent officials, and there was no doubt that he used them in some of his political intrigues. He, Zephas, would bet something that it was a woman who had helped him off! Did she speak?

Yes, she had spoken. It made her sick to sit there and hear such stories! Because a man did not agree with some people in politics it was perfectly awful to think how they would abuse him and take away his character! Men were so awfully jealous, too; if another man happened to be superior and fine-looking there wasn't anything bad enough for them to say about him! No! she

wasn't a slavery sympathiser either, and hadn't anything to do with man politics, although she was a Southern woman, and the MacEwans had come from Kentucky and owned slaves. Of course, he, Zephas, whose ancestors were Cape Cod Quakers, and had always been sailors, couldn't understand. She did not know what he meant by saying 'what a long tail our cat's got,' but if he meant to call her a cat, and was going to use such language to her, he had better have stayed in San Francisco with his Vigilante friends. And perhaps it would have been better if he had stayed there before he took her away from her parents at Martinez. Then she wouldn't have been left on a desert rock without any chance of seeing the world, or ever making any friends or acquaintances!

THEIR FIRST QUARREL

It was their first quarrel. Discreetly made up by Mrs. Bunker in some alarm at betraying

herself; honestly forgiven by Zephas in a rude, remorseful consciousness of her limited life. One or two nights later, when he returned, it was with a mingled air of mystery and satisfaction. 'Well, Mollie,' he said cheerfully, 'it looks as if your pets were not as bad as I thought them.'

'My pets!' repeated Mrs. Bunker, with a faint rising of colour.

'Well, I call these Southern Chivs your pets, Mollie, because you stuck up for them so the other night. But never mind that now. What do you suppose has happened? Jim Rider, you know, the Southern banker and speculator, who's a regular big Injin among the "Chivs," he sent Cap Simmons down to the wharf while I was unloadin' to come and see him. Well, I went, and what do y'u think? He told me he was gettin' up an American Fishin' Company, and wanted me to take charge of a first-class schooner on shares. Said he heard of me afore, and knew I was an American and a white man, and just the chap ez could knock them Eytalians outer the market.'

'Yes,' interrupted Mrs. Bunker quickly, but emphatically, 'the fishing interest ought to be American and protected by the State, with regular charters and treaties.'

'I say, Mollie,' said her astonished but

admiring husband, 'you've been readin' the papers or listenin' to stump speakin', sure.'

'Go on,' returned Mrs. Bunker impatiently, 'and say what happened next.'

'Well,' returned Zephas, 'I first thought, you see, that it had suthin to do with that Marion business, particklerly ez folks allowed he was hidin' somewhere yet, and they wanted me to run him off. So I thought Rider might as well know that I wasn't to be bribed, so I ups and tells him how I'd been lyin' off Sancelito the other day workin' for the other side agin him. With that he laughs, says he didn't want any better friends than me, but that I must be livin' in the backwoods not to know that Wynyard Marion had escaped, and was then at sea on his way to Mexico or Central America. Then we agreed to terms, and the long and short of it is, Mollie, that I'm to have the schooner with a hundred and fifty dollars a month, and 10 per cent. shares after a year! Looks like biz, eh, Mollie, old girl? but you don't seem pleased.'

She had put aside the arm with which he was drawing her to him, and had turned her white face away to the window. So *he* had gone—this stranger—this one friend of her life—she would never see him again, and all that would ever come of it was this pecuniary benefit to her husband,

who had done nothing. He would not even offer her money, but he had managed to pay his debt to her in this way that their vulgar poverty would appreciate. And this was the end of her dream!

'You don't seem to take it in, Mollie,' continued the surprised Zephas. 'It means a house in 'Frisco and a little cabin for you on the schooner when you like.'

'I don't want it! I won't have it! I shall stay here,' she burst out with a half-passionate, half-childish cry, and ran into her bedroom, leaving the astonished Zephas helpless in his awkward consternation.

'By Gum! I must take her to 'Frisco right off, or she'll be havin' the high strikes here alone. I oughter knowed it would come to this!' But although he consulted 'Cap' Simmons the next day, who informed him it was all woman's ways when 'struck,' and advised him to pay out all the line he could at such delicate moments, she had no recurrence of the outbreak. On the contrary, for days and weeks following, she seemed calmer, older, and more 'growed up;' although she resisted changing her sea-shore dwelling for San Francisco she accompanied him on one or two of his 'deep sea' trips down the coast, and seemed happier on their Southern limits. She had taken to reading the political papers and speeches, and

some cheap American histories. Captain Bunker's crew, profoundly convinced that their skipper's wife was a 'woman's rights' fanatic, with the baleful qualities of a 'sea lawyer' superadded, marvelled at his bringing her.

It was on returning home from one of these

HE CONSULTED 'CAP' SIMMONS

trips that they touched briefly at San Francisco, where the Secretary of the Fishing Company came on board. Mrs. Bunker was startled to recognise in him one of the two gentlemen who had taken Mr. Marion off in the boat, but as he did not appear to recognise her even after an awkward introduction by her husband, she would

have recovered her equanimity but for a singular incident. As her husband turned momentarily away, the Secretary, with a significant gesture,

SLIPPED A LETTER INTO HER HAND

slipped a letter into her hand. She felt the blood rush to her face as, with a smile, he moved away to follow her husband. She came down to the

little cabin and impatiently tore open the envelope, which bore no address. A small folded note contained the following lines :—

'I never intended to burden you with my confidence, but the discretion, tact, and courage you displayed on our first meeting, and what I know of your loyalty since, have prompted me to trust myself again to your kindness, even though you are now aware whom you have helped, and the risks you ran. My friends wish to communicate with me and to forward to me, from time to time, certain papers of importance, which, owing to the tyrannical espionage of the Government, would be discovered and stopped in passing through the Express or Post Office. These papers will be left at your house, but here I must trust entirely to your wit and judgment as to the way in which they should be delivered to my agent at the nearest Mexican port. To facilitate your action, your husband will receive directions to pursue his course as far south as Todos Santos, where a boat will be ready to take charge of them when he is sighted. I know I am asking a great favour, but I have such confidence in you that I do not even ask you to commit yourself to a reply to this. If it can be done I know that you will do it; if it cannot, I will understand and appreciate the reason why.

will only ask you that when you are ready to receive the papers you will fly a small red pennant from the little flagstaff among the rocks. Believe me, your friend and grateful debtor,

'W. M.'

Mrs. Bunker cast a hasty glance around her, and pressed the letter to her lips. It was a sudden consummation of her vaguest, half-formed wishes, the realisation of her wildest dreams! To be the confidante of the gallant but melancholy hero in his lonely exile and persecution was to satisfy all the unformulated romantic fancies of her girlish reading; to be later, perhaps, the Flora Macdonald of a middle-aged Prince Charlie did not, however, evoke any ludicrous associations in her mind. Her feminine fancy exalted the escaped duellist and alleged assassin into a social martyr. His actual small political intrigues and ignoble aims of office seemed to her little different from those aspirations of royalty which she had read about—as perhaps they were. Indeed, it is to be feared that in foolish little Mrs. Bunker Wynyard Marion had found the old feminine adoration of pretension and privilege which every rascal has taken advantage of since the flood.

Howbeit, the next morning after she had returned and Zephas had sailed away, she flew a

red bandanna handkerchief on the little flagstaff before the house. A few hours later, a boat appeared mysteriously from around the Point. Its only occupant—a common sailor—asked her name, and handed her a sealed package. Mrs. Bunker's invention had already been at work. She had created an aunt in Mexico, for whom she had, with some ostentation, made some small purchases while in San Francisco. When her husband spoke of going as far south as Todos Santos, she begged him to deliver the parcel to her aunt's messenger, and even addressed it boldly to her. Inside the outer wrapper she wrote a note to Marion, which, with a new and amazing diffidence, she composed and altered a dozen times, at last addressing the following in a large, school-girl hand: 'Sir, I obey your commands to the last. Whatever your oppressors or enemies may do, you can always rely and trust upon She who in deepest sympathy signs herself ever, Mollie Rosalie MacEwan.' The substitution of her maiden name in full seemed in her simplicity to be a delicate exclusion of her husband from the affair, and a certain disguise of herself to alien eyes. The superscription, 'To Mrs. Marion MacEwan from Mollie Bunker, to be called for by hand at Todos Santos,' also struck her as a marvel of ingenuity. The package was safely

and punctually delivered by Zephas, who brought back a small packet directed to her, which on private examination proved to contain a letter addressed to 'J. E. Kirby, to be called for,' with the hurried line: 'A thousand thanks, W. M.' Mrs. Bunker drew a long, quick breath. He might have written more; he might have——but the wish remained still unformulated. The next day she ran up a signal; the same boat and solitary rower appeared around the Point, and took the package. A week later, when her husband was ready for sea, she again hoisted her signal. It brought a return package for Mexico, which she enclosed and re-addressed, and gave to her husband. The recurrence of this incident apparently struck a bright idea from the simple Zephas.

'Look here, Mollie, why don't you come *yourself* and see your aunt. I can't go into port without a licence, and them port charges cost a heap o' red tape, for they've got a Filibuster scare on down there just now, but you can go ashore in the boat and I'll get permission from the Secretary to stand off and wait for you there for twenty-four hours.' Mrs. Bunker flushed and paled at the thought. She could see him! The letter would be sufficient excuse, the distrust suggested by her husband would give colour to

her delivering it in person. There was perhaps a brief twinge of conscience in taking this advantage of Zephas's kindness, but the next moment, with that peculiar logic known only to the sex, she made the unfortunate man's suggestion a condonation of her deceit. *She* hadn't asked to go; *he* had offered to take her. He had only himself to thank.

Meantime the political excitement in which she had become a partisan without understanding or even conviction, presently culminated with the Presidential campaign and the election of Abraham Lincoln. The intrigues of Southern statesmen were revealed in open expression, and echoed in California by those citizens of Southern birth and extraction who had long held place, power, and opinion there. There were rumours of secession, of California joining the South, or of her founding an independent Pacific Empire. A note from 'J. E. Kirby' informed Mrs. Bunker that she was to carefully retain any correspondence that might be in her hands until further orders, almost at the same time that Zephas as regretfully told her that his projected Southern trip had been suspended. Mrs. Bunker was disappointed, and yet, in some singular conditions of her feelings, felt relieved that her meeting with Marion was postponed. It is to be feared that some dim conviction, unworthy

a partisan, that in the magnitude of political events her own petty personality might be overlooked by her hero, tended somewhat to her resignation.

Meanwhile the seasons had changed. The winter rains had set in; the Trade winds had shifted to the south-east, and the cottage, although strengthened, enlarged, and made more comfortable through the good fortunes of the Bunkers, was no longer sheltered by the cliff, but was exposed to the full strength of the Pacific gales. There were long nights when she could hear the rain fall monotonously on the shingles, or startle her with a short, sharp reveille on the windows; there were brief days of flying clouds and drifting sunshine, and intervals of dull grey shadow, when the heaving white breakers beyond the gate slowly lifted themselves and sank before her like wraiths of warning. At such times, in her accepted solitude, Mrs. Bunker gave herself up to strange moods and singular visions; the more audacious and more striking it seemed to her from their very remoteness, and the difficulty she was beginning to have in materialising them. The actual personality of Wynyard Marion, as she knew it in her one interview, had become very shadowy and faint in the months that passed, yet when the days were heavy she sometimes saw herself standing by his side in some vague tropical

surroundings, and hailed by the multitude as the faithful wife and consort of the great Leader, President, Emperor—she knew not what! Exactly how this was to be managed, and the manner of Zephas's effacement from the scene, never troubled her childish fancy, and, it is but fair to say, her woman's conscience. In the logic before alluded to, it seemed to her that all ethical responsibility for her actions rested with the husband who had unduly married her. Nor were those visions always roseate. In the wild declamation of that exciting epoch which filled the newspapers, there was talk of short shrift with traitors. So there were days when the sudden onset of a squall of hail against her window caused her to start as if she had heard the sharp fusillade of that file of muskets of which she had sometimes read in history.

One day she had a singular fright. She had heard the sound of oars falling with a precision and regularity unknown to her. She was startled to see the approach of a large eight-oar barge rowed by men in uniform, with two officers wrapped in cloaks in the stern sheets, and before them the glitter of musket barrels. The two officers appeared to be conversing earnestly, and occasionally pointing to the shore and the bluff above. For an instant she trembled, and then ar

instinct of revolt and resistance followed. She hurriedly removed the ring, which she usually wore when alone, from her finger, slipped it with the packet under the mattress of her bed, and prepared with blazing eyes to face the intruders. But when the boat was beached, the two officers,

'THIS IS PRIVATE PROPERTY,' SHE SAID

with scarcely a glance towards the cottage, proceeded leisurely along the shore. Relieved, yet it must be confessed a little piqued at their indifference, she snatched up her hat and sallied forth to confront them.

'I suppose you don't know that this is private property?' she said sharply.

The group halted and turned towards her. The orderly, who was following, turned his face aside and smiled. The younger officer demurely lifted his cap. The elder, grey, handsome, in a general's uniform, after a moment's half-astounded, half-amused scrutiny of the little figure, gravely raised his gauntleted fingers in a military salute.

'I beg your pardon, madam, but I am afraid we never even thought of that. We are making a preliminary survey for the Government with a possible view of fortifying the bluff. It is very doubtful if you will be disturbed in any rights you may have, but if you are, the Government will not fail to make it good to you.' He turned carelessly to the aide beside him. 'I suppose the bluff is quite inaccessible from here?'

'I don't know about that, general. They say that Marion, after he killed Henderson, escaped down this way,' said the young man.

'Indeed—what good was that? How did he get away from here?'

'They say that Mrs. Fairfax was hanging round in a boat, waiting for him. The story o the escape is all out now.'

They moved away with a slight perfunctor bow to Mrs. Bunker, only the younger office noting that the pert, pretty little Western woma

wasn't as sharp and snappy to his superior as she had at first promised to be.

She turned back to the cottage astounded, angry, and vaguely alarmed. Who was this Mrs. Fairfax who had usurped her fame and solitary devotion? There was no woman in the boat that took him off; it was equally well known that he went in the ship alone. If they had heard that some woman was with him here—why should they have supposed it was Mrs. Fairfax? Zephas might know something—but he was away. The thought haunted her that day and the next. On the third came a more startling incident.

She had been wandering along the edge of her domain in a state of restlessness which had driven her from the monotony of the house when she heard the barking of the big Newfoundland dog which Zephas had lately bought for protection and company. She looked up and saw the boat and its solitary rower at the landing. She ran quickly to the house to bring the packet. As she entered she started back in amazement. For the sitting-room was already in possession of a woman who was seated calmly by the table.

The stranger turned on Mrs. Bunker that frankly insolent glance and deliberate examination which only one woman can give another. In that glance Mrs. Bunker felt herself in the presence of

a superior, even if her own eyes had not told her that in beauty, attire and bearing the intruder was of a type and condition far beyond her own, or even that of any she had known. It was the more crushing that there also seemed to be in this haughty woman the same incongruousness and sharp contrast to the plain and homely surroundings of the cottage that she remembered in *him*.

'Yo'-aw Mrs. Bunker, I believe,' she said in languid Southern accents. 'How de doh?'

'I am Mrs. Bunker,' said Mrs. Bunker shortly.

'And so this is where Cunnle Marion stopped when he waited fo' the boat to take him off,' said the stranger, glancing lazily around, and delaying with smiling insolence the explanation she knew Mrs. Bunker was expecting. 'The Cunnle said it was a pooh enough place, but I don't see it. I reckon, however, he was too worried to judge and glad enough to get off. Yo' ought to have made him talk—he generally don't want much prompting to talk to women, if they're pooty.'

'He didn't seem in a hurry to go,' said Mrs Bunker indignantly. The next moment she saw her error, even before the cruel, handsome smile of her unbidden guest revealed it.

'I thought so,' she said lazily; 'this *is* the place and here's where the Cunnle stayed. Only

yo' oughtn't have given him and yo'self away to the first stranger quite so easy. The Cunnle might have taught yo' *that* the two or three hours he was with yo'.'

'What do you want with me?' demanded Mrs. Bunker angrily.

'I want a letter yo' have for me from Cunnle Marion.'

'I have nothing for you,' said Mrs. Bunker. 'I don't know who you are.'

'You ought to, considering you've been acting as messenger between the Cunnle and me,' said the lady coolly.

'That's not true,' said Mrs. Bunker hotly, to combat an inward sinking.

The lady rose with a lazy, languid grace, walked to the door and called still lazily, 'O Pedro!'

The solitary rower clambered up the rocks and appeared on the cottage threshold.

'Is this the lady who gave you the letters for me and to whom you took mine?'

'*Si, Señora.*'

'They were addressed to a Mr. Kirby,' said Mrs. Bunker sullenly. 'How was I to know they were for Mrs. Kirby?'

'Mr. Kirby, Mrs. Kirby and myself are all the same. You don't suppose the Cunnle would

give my real name and address? Did you address yo'r packet to *his* real name or to someone else? Did you let your husband know who they were for?'

Oddly, a sickening sense of the meanness of all these deceits and subterfuges suddenly came over Mrs. Bunker. Without replying she went to her bedroom and returned with Colonel Marion's last letter, which she tossed into her visitor's lap.

'Thank yo', Mrs. Bunker. I'll be sure to tell the Cunnle how careful yo' were not to give up his correspondence to everybody. It'll please him mo' than to hear yo' are wearing his ring—which everybody knows—before people.'

'He gave it to me—he—he knew I wouldn't take money,' said Mrs. Bunker indignantly.

'He didn't have any to give,' said the lady slowly, as she removed the envelope from her letter and looked up with a dazzling but cruel smile. 'A So'th'n gentleman don't fill up his pockets when he goes out to fight. He don't tuck his maw's Bible in his breast-pocket, clap his dear auntie's locket big as a cheese plate over his heart, nor let his sole leather cigyar case that his gyrl gave him lie round him in spots when he goes out to take another gentleman's fire. He leaves that to Yanks!'

'Did you come here to insult my husband?' said Mrs. Bunker in the rage of desperation.

'To insult yo' husband! Well—I came here to get a letter that his wife received from his political and natural enemy and—perhaps *I did*!' With a side glance at Mrs. Bunker's crimson cheek she added carelessly, 'I have nothing against Captain Bunker, he's a straightforward man and must go with his kind. He helped those hounds of Vigilantes because he believes in them. We couldn't bribe him if we wanted to. And we don't.'

If she only knew something of this woman's relations to Marion—which she only instinctively suspected—and could retaliate upon her, Mrs. Bunker felt she would have given up her life at that moment.

'Colonel Marion seems to find plenty that he can bribe,' she said roughly, 'and I've yet to know who *you* are to sit in judgment on them. You've got your letter, take it and go! When he wants to send you another through me, somebody else must come for it, not you. That's all!'

She drew back as if to let the intruder pass, but the lady, without moving a muscle, finished the reading of her letter, then stood up quietly and began carefully to draw her handsome cloak over her shoulders. 'Yo' want to know who I

am, Mrs. Bunker,' she said, arranging the velvet collar under her white oval chin. 'Well, I'm a So'th'n woman from Figinya, and I'm Figinyan first, last, and all the time.' She shook out her sleeves and the folds of her cloak. 'I believe in State rights and slavery—if you know what that means. I hate the North, I hate the East, I hate the West. I hate this nigger Government, I'd kill that man Lincoln quicker than lightning!' She began to draw down the fingers of her gloves, holding her shapely hands upright before her. 'I'm hard and fast to the Cause. I gave up house and niggers for it.' She began to button her gloves at the wrist with some difficulty, tightly setting together her beautiful lips as she did so. 'I gave up my husband for it, and I went to the man who loved it better and had risked more for it than ever he had. Cunnle Marion's my friend. I'm Mrs. Fairfax, Josephine Hardee that was; *his* disciple and follower. Well, maybe those puritanical No'th'n folks might give it another name!'

She moved slowly towards the door, but on the threshold paused, as Colonel Marion had, and came back to Mrs. Bunker with an outstretched hand. 'I don't see that yo' and me need quo'll. I didn't come here for that. I came here to see yo'r husband, and seeing *yo'* I thought it was only right to talk squarely to yo', as yo' under

stand. I *wouldn't* talk to yo'r husband. Mrs. Bunker, I want yo'r husband to take me away—I want him to take me to the Cunnle. If I tried to go in any other way I'd be watched, spied upon and followed, and only lead those hounds on his track. I don't expect yo' to *ask* yo' husband for me, but only not to interfere when I do.'

There was a touch of unexpected weakness in her voice and a look of pain in her eyes which was not unlike what Mrs. Bunker had seen and pitied in Marion. But they were the eyes of a woman who had humbled her, and Mrs. Bunker would have been unworthy her sex if she had not felt a cruel enjoyment in it. Yet the dominance of the stranger was still so strong that she did not dare to refuse the proffered hand. She, however, slipped the ring from her finger, and laid it in Mrs. Fairfax's palm.

'You can take that with you,' she said, with a desperate attempt to imitate the other's previous indifference. 'I shouldn't like to deprive you and *your friend* of the opportunity of making use of it again. As for *my* husband, I shall say nothing of you to him as long as you say nothing to him of me—which I suppose is what you mean.'

The insolent look came back to Mrs. Fairfax's face. 'I reckon yo're right,' she said quietly, putting the ring in her pocket as she fixed her

dark eyes on Mrs. Bunker, 'and the ring may be of use again. Good-bye, Mrs. Bunker.'

She waved her hand carelessly, and turning away passed out of the house. A moment later the boat and its two occupants pushed from the shore, and disappeared round the Point.

Then Mrs. Bunker looked round the room, and down upon her empty finger, and knew that it was the end of her dream. It was all over now —indeed, with the picture of that proud, insolent woman before her she wondered if it had ever begun. This was the woman she had allowed herself to think *she* might be. This was the woman *he* was thinking of when he sat there; this was the Mrs. Fairfax the officers had spoken of, and who had made her—Mrs. Bunker—the go-between for their love-making! All the work that she had done for him, the deceit she had practised on her husband, was to bring him and this woman together! And they both knew it, and had no doubt laughed at her and her pretensions!

It was with a burning cheek that she thought how she had intended to go to Marion, and imagined herself arriving perhaps to find that shameless woman already there. In her vague unformulated longings she had never before realised the degradation into which her foolish

romance might lead her. She saw it now; that humiliating moral lesson we are all apt to experience in the accidental display of our own particular vices in the person we hate, she had just felt in Mrs. Fairfax's presence. With it came the paralysing fear of her husband's discovery of her secret. Secure as she had been in her dull belief that he had in some way wronged her by marrying her, she for the first time began to doubt if this condoned the deceit she had practised on him. The tribute Mrs. Fairfax had paid him—this appreciation of his integrity and honesty by an enemy and a woman like herself—troubled her, frightened her, and filled her with her first jealousy! What if this woman should tell him all; what if she should make use of him as Marion had of her! Zephas was a strong Northern partisan, but was he proof against the guileful charms of such a devil? She had never thought before of questioning his fidelity to her; she suddenly remembered now some rough pleasantries of Captain Simmons in regard to the inconstancy of his calling. No! there was but one thing for her to do; she would make a clean breast to him; she would tell him everything she had done except the fatal fancy that compelled her to it! She began to look for his coming now with alternate hope and fear—with unabated impatience! The

night that he should have arrived passed slowly; morning came, but not Zephas. When the mist had lifted she ran impatiently to the rocks and gazed anxiously towards the lower bay. There were a few grey sails scarce distinguishable above the greyer water—but they were not his. She glanced half mechanically seawards, and her eyes became suddenly fixed. There was no mistake! She knew the rig!—she could see the familiar white lap-streak as the vessel careened on the starboard tack—it was her husband's schooner slowly creeping out of the Golden Gate!

PART III

HER first wild impulse was to run to the cove, for the little dingey always moored there, and to desperately attempt to overtake him. But the swift consciousness of its impossibility was followed by a dull, bewildering torpor, that kept her motionless, helplessly following the vessel with straining eyes, as if they could evoke some response from its decks. She was so lost in this occupation that she did not see that a pilot boat nearly abreast of the cove had put out a two-oared gig, which was pulling quickly for the rocks. When she saw it, she trembled with the instinct that it brought her intelligence. She was right;

it was a brief note from her husband, informing her that he had been hurriedly despatched on a short sea cruise; that in order to catch the tide he had not time to go ashore at the bluff, but he would explain everything on his return. Her relief was only partial; she was already experienced enough in his vocation to know that the excuse was a feeble one. He could easily have 'fetched' the bluff in tacking out of the Gate and have signalled to her to board him in her own boat. The next day she locked up her house, rowed round the Point to the *Embarcadero*, where the Bay steamboats occasionally touched and took up passengers to San Francisco. Captain Simmons had not seen her husband this last trip; indeed, did not know that he had gone out of the Bay. Mrs. Bunker was seized with a desperate idea. She called upon the Secretary of the Fishing Trust. That gentleman was business-like, but neither expansive nor communicative. Her husband had *not* been ordered out to sea by them; she ought to know that Captain Bunker was now his own master, choosing his own fishing grounds, and his own times and seasons. He was not aware of any secret service for the Company in which Captain Bunker was engaged. He hoped Mrs. Bunker would distinctly remember that the little matter of the duel to which she re-

ferred was an old bygone affair, and never anything but a personal matter, in which the Fishery had no concern whatever, and in which *he* certainly should not again engage. He would advise Mrs. Bunker, if she valued her own good, and especially her husband's, to speedily forget all about it. These were ugly times, as it was. If Mrs. Bunker's services had not been properly rewarded or considered it was certainly a great shame, but really *he* could not be expected to make it good. Certain parties had cost him trouble enough already. Besides, really, she must see that his position between her husband, whom he respected, and a certain other party was a delicate one. But Mrs. Bunker heard no more. She turned and ran down the staircase, carrying with her a burning cheek and blazing eye that somewhat startled the complacent official.

She did not remember how she got home again. She had a vague recollection of passing through the crowded streets, wondering if the people knew that she was an outcast, deserted by her husband, deceived by her ideal hero, repudiated by her friends! Men had gathered in knots before the newspaper offices, excited and gesticulating over the bulletin boards that had such strange legends as 'The Crisis,' 'Details of an Alleged Conspiracy to Overthrow the Govern-

ment,' 'The Assassin of Henderson to the Fore Again,' 'Rumoured Arrests on the Mexican Frontier.' Sometimes she thought she understood the drift of them; even fancied they were the outcome of her visit—as if her very presence carried treachery and suspicion with it—but

MEN HAD GATHERED IN KNOTS

generally they only struck her benumbed sense as a dull, meaningless echo of something that had happened long ago. When she reached her house, late that night, the familiar solitude of shore and sea gave her a momentary relief, but with it came the terrible conviction that she had

forfeited her right to it, that when her husband came back it would be hers no longer, and that with their meeting she would know it no more, For through all her childish vacillation and imaginings she managed to cling to one steadfast resolution. She would tell him *everything*, and know the worst. Perhaps he would never come; perhaps she should not be alive to meet him.

And so the days and nights slowly passed. The solitude which her previous empty deceit had enabled her to fill with such charming visions now in her awakened remorse seemed only to protract her misery. Had she been a more experienced, though even a more guilty, woman she would have suffered less. Without sympathy or counsel, without even the faintest knowledge of the world or its standards of morality to guide her, she accepted her isolation and friendlessness as a necessary part of her wrongdoing. Her only criterion was her enemy—Mrs. Fairfax—and *she* could seek her relief by joining her lover; but Mrs. Bunker knew now that she herself had never had one—and was alone! Mrs. Fairfax had broken openly with her husband; but *she* had *deceived* hers, and the experience and reckoning were still to come. In her miserable confession it was not strange that this half child, half woman, sometimes looked towards that grey sea, eternally

waiting for her—that sea which had taken everything from her and given her nothing in return—for an obliterating, and perhaps exonerating death!

The third day of her waiting isolation was

THAT GREY SEA, ETERNALLY WAITING FOR HER

broken upon by another intrusion. The morning had been threatening, with an opaque, motionless, livid arch above, which had taken the place of the usual flying scud and shaded cloud masses of the rainy season. The whole outlying ocean, too, beyond the bar, appeared nearer, and even seemed

to be lifted higher than the Bay itself, and was lit every now and then with wonderful clearness by long flashes of breaking foam like summer lightning. She knew that this meant a south-wester, and began, with a certain mechanical deliberation, to set her little domain in order against the coming gale. She drove the cows to the rude shed among the scrub oaks, she collected the goats and young kids in the corral, and replenished the stock of fuel from the wood-pile. She was quite hidden in the shrubbery when she saw a boat making slow headway against the wind towards the little cove where but a moment before she had drawn up the dingey beyond the reach of breaking seas. It was a

AGAINST THE COMING GALE

whale boat from Sancelito containing a few men. As they neared the landing she recognised in the man who seemed to be directing the boat the second friend of Colonel Marion—the man who had come with the Secretary to take him off, but whom she had never seen again. In her present horror of that memory she remained hidden, determined at all hazards to avoid a meeting. When they had landed, one of the men halted accidentally before the shrubbery where she was concealed as he caught his first view of the cottage, which had been invisible from the point they had rounded.

'Look here, Bragg,' he said, turning to Marion's friend, in a voice which was distinctly audible to Mrs. Bunker. 'What are we to say to these people?'

'There's only one,' returned the other. 'The man's at sea. His wife's here. She's all right.'

'You said she was one of us?'

'After a fashion. She's the woman who helped Marion when he was here. I reckon he made it square with her from the beginning, for she forwarded letters from him since. But you can tell her as much or as little as you find necessary when you see her.'

'Yes, but we must settle that *now*,' said Bragg sharply, 'and I propose to tell her *nothing*. I'm

against having any more petticoats mixed up with our affairs. I propose to make an examination of the place without bothering our heads about her.'

'But we must give some reason for coming here, and we must ask her to keep dark, or we'll have her blabbing to the first person she meets,' urged the other.

'She's not likely to see anybody before night, when the brig will be in and the men and guns landed. Move on, and let Jim take soundings off the cove, while I look along the shore. It's just as well that there's a house here, and a little cover like this'—pointing to the shrubbery—'to keep the men from making too much of a show until after the earthworks are up. There are sharp eyes over at the fort.'

'There don't seem to be anyone in the house now,' returned the other after a moment's scrutiny of the cottage, 'or the woman would surely come out at the barking of the dogs, even if she hadn't seen us. Likely she's gone to Sancelito.'

'So much the better. Just as well that she should know nothing until it happens. Afterwards we'll settle with the husband for the price of possession; he has only a squatter's rights. Come along; we'll have bad weather before we get back round the Point again, but so much the better, for it will keep off any inquisitive longshore cruisers.'

They moved away. But Mrs. Bunker, stung through her benumbed and brooding consciousness, and made desperate by this repeated revelation of her former weakness, had heard enough to make her feverish to hear more. She knew the intricacies of the shrubbery thoroughly. She knew every foot of shade and cover of the clearing, and creeping like a cat from bush to bush she managed, without being discovered, to keep the party in sight and hearing all the time. It required no great discernment, even for an inexperienced woman like herself, at the end of an hour, to gather their real purpose. It was to prepare for the secret landing of an armed force, disguised as labourers, who, under the outward show of quarrying in the bluff, were to throw up breastworks, and fortify the craggy shelf. The landing was fixed for that night, and was to be effected by a vessel now cruising outside the Heads.

She understood it all now. She remembered Marion's speech about the importance of the bluff for military purposes; she remembered the visit of the officers from the fort opposite. The strangers were stealing a march upon the Government, and by night would be in possession. It was perhaps an evidence of her newly-awakened and larger comprehension that she took no thought

of her loss of home and property—perhaps there was little to draw her to it now—but was conscious only of a more terrible catastrophe—a catastrophe to which she was partly accessory, of which any other woman would have warned her husband—or at least those officers of the Fort whose business it was to—Ah, yes! the officers of the Fort—only just opposite to her! She trembled, and yet flushed with an inspiration. It was not too late yet—why not warn them *now*?

But how? A message sent by Sancelito and the steamboat to San Francisco—the usual way—would not reach them to-night. To go herself, rowing directly across in the dingey, would be the only security of success. If she could do it? It was a long pull—the sea was getting up—but she would try.

She waited until the last man had stepped into the boat, in nervous dread of someone remaining. Then, when the boat had vanished round the Point again, she ran back to the cottage, arrayed herself in her husband's pilot coat, hat and boots, and launched the dingey. It was a heavy, slow, but luckily a staunch and seaworthy, boat. It was not until she was well off shore that she began to feel the full fury of the wind and waves, and knew the difficulty and danger of her undertaking. She had decided that her shortest and most direct

course was within a few points of the wind, but the quartering of the waves on the broad bluff bows of the boat tended to throw it to leeward, a movement that, while it retarded her forward progress, no doubt saved the little craft from swamping. Again, the feebleness and shortness of her stroke, which never impelled her through a rising wave, but rather lifted her half-way up its face, prevented the boat from taking much water, while her steadfast gaze, fixed only on the slowly-retreating shore, kept her steering free from any fatal nervous vacillation which the sight of the threatening seas on her bow might have produced. Preserved through her very weakness, ignorance, and simplicity of purpose, the dingey had all the security of a drifting boat, yet retained a certain gentle but persistent guidance. In this feminine fashion she made enough headway to carry her abreast of the Point, where she met the reflux current sweeping round it that carried her well along into the

ARRAYED HERSELF IN HER HUSBAND'S PILOT COAT

channel, now sluggish with the turn of the tide. After half an hour's pulling, she was delighted to find herself again in a reverse current, abreast of her cottage, but steadily increasing her distance from it. She was, in fact, on the extreme outer edge of a vast whirlpool formed by the force of the gale on a curving lee shore, and was being carried to her destination in a semi-circle around that bay which she never could have crossed. She was moving now in a line with the shore and the Fort, whose flagstaff, above its green, square, and white quarters, she could see distinctly, and whose lower water battery and landing seemed to stretch out from the rocks scarcely a mile ahead. Protected by the shore from the fury of the wind, and even of the sea, her progress was also steadily accelerated by the velocity of the current, mingling with the ebbing tide. A sudden fear seized her. She turned the boat's head towards the shore, but it was swept quickly round again; she redoubled her exertions, tugging frantically at her helpless oars. She only succeeded in getting the boat into the trough of the sea, where, after a lurch that threatened to capsize it, it providentially swung around on its short keel and began to drift stern on. She was almost abreast of the battery now; she could hear the fitful notes of a bugle that seemed blown and

scattered above her head; she even thought she could see some men in blue uniforms moving along the little pier. She was passing it; another fruitless effort to regain her ground, but she was swept along steadily towards the Gate, the whitening bar and the open sea.

She knew now what it all meant. This was what she had come for; this was the end! Beyond, only a little beyond, just a few moments longer to wait, and then, out there among the breakers was the rest that she had longed for but had not dared to seek. It was not her fault; they could not blame *her*. He would come back and never know what had happened—nor even know how she had tried to atone for her deceit. And he would find his house in possession of—of—those devils! No! No! she must not die yet, at least not until she had warned the Fort. She seized the oars again with frenzied strength; the boat had stopped under the unwonted strain; staggered, tried to rise in an uplifted sea, took part of it over her bow, struck down Mrs. Bunker under half a ton of blue water that wrested the oars from her paralysed hands like playthings, swept them over the gunwale, and left her lying senseless in the bottom of the boat.

* * * * *

'Hold har-rd—or you'll run her down.'

'Now then, Riley—look alive—is it slapin' ye are!'

'Hold yer jaw, Flanigan, and stand ready with the boat hook. Now then, hold har-rd!'

The sudden jarring and tilting of the water-logged boat, a sound of rasping timbers, the

STRUCK DOWN MRS. BUNKER

swarming of men in shirt sleeves and blue trousers around her, seemed to rouse her momentarily, but she again fainted away.

When she struggled back to consciousness once more she was wrapped in a soldier's jacket, her head pillowed on the shirt-sleeve of an artillery corporal in the stern sheets of that eight-oared

Government barge she had remembered. But the only officer was a bare-headed, boyish lieutenant, and the rowers were an athletic but unseamanlike crew of mingled artillerymen and infantry.

HER HEAD PILLOWED ON THE SHIRT-SLEEVE OF AN ARTILLERY CORPORAL

'And where did ye drift from, darlint?'

Mrs. Bunker bridled feebly at the epithet.

'I didn't drift. I was going to the Fort.'

'The Fort, is it?'

'Yes. I want to see the General.'

'Wadn't the Liftenant do ye? Or shure there's the Adjutant; he's a foine man.'

'Silence, Flanigan,' said the young officer sharply. Then turning to Mrs. Bunker he said, 'Don't mind *him*, but let his wife take you to the canteen, when we get in, and get you some dry clothes.'

But Mrs. Bunker, spurred to convalescence at the indignity, protested stiffly, and demanded on her arrival to be led at once to the General's quarters. A few officers, who had been attracted

to the pier by the rescue, acceded to her demand.

She recognised the grey-haired, handsome man who had come ashore at her house. With a touch of indignation at her treatment, she briefly told her story. But the General listened coldly and gravely with his eyes fixed upon her face.

'You say you recognised in the leader of the party a man you had seen before. Under what circumstances?'

Mrs. Bunker hesitated with burning cheeks. 'He came to take Colonel Marion from our place.'

'When you were hiding him—yes, we've heard the story. Now, Mrs. Bunker, may I ask you what you, as a Southern sympathiser, expect to gain by telling me this story?'

But here Mrs. Bunker burst out. 'I am not a Southern sympathiser! Never! Never! Never! I'm a Union woman—wife of a Northern man. I helped that man before I knew who he was. Any Christian, Northerner or Southerner, would have done the same!'

Her sincerity and passion were equally unmistakable. The General rose, opened the door of the adjoining room, said a few words to an orderly on duty and returned. 'What you are asking of me, Mrs. Bunker, is almost as extra-

vagant and unprecedented as your story. You must understand, as well as your husband, that if I land a force on your property it will be to *take possession* of it in the name of the Government, for Government purposes.'

HER SINCERITY AND PASSION WERE EQUALLY UNMISTAKABLE

'Yes, yes,' said Mrs. Bunker eagerly; 'I know that. I am willing; Zephas will be willing.'

'And,' continued the General, fixing his eyes on her face, 'you will also understand that I may be compelled to detain you here as a hostage for the safety of my men.'

'Oh no! no! please!' said Mrs. Bunker, springing up with an imploring feminine gesture; 'I am expecting my husband. He may be coming back at any moment; I must be there to see him

first! Please let me go back, sir, with your men; put me anywhere ashore between them and those men that are coming. Lock me up; keep me a prisoner in my own home; do anything else if you think I am deceiving you; but don't keep me here to miss him when he comes!'

'But you can see him later,' said the General.

'But I must see him *first*,' said Mrs. Bunker desperately. 'I must see him first, for—for—*he knows nothing of this*. He knows nothing of my helping Colonel Marion; he knows nothing of—how foolish I have been, and—he must not know it from others! There!' It was out at last. She was sobbing now, but her pride was gone. She felt relieved, and did not even notice the presence of two or three other officers, who had entered the room, exchanged a few hurried words with their superior, and were gazing at her in astonishment.

The General's brow relaxed, and he smiled. 'Very well, Mrs. Bunker; it shall be as you like, then. You shall go and meet your husband with Captain Jennings here'—indicating one of the officers—'who will take charge of you and the party.'

'And,' said Mrs. Bunker, looking imploringly through her wet but pretty lashes at the officer, 'he won't say anything to Zephas, either?'

'Not a syllable,' said Captain Jennings gravely. 'But while the tug is getting ready, General, hadn't Mrs. Bunker better go to Mrs. Flanigan?'

'I think not,' said the General, with a significant look at the officer as he gallantly offered his arm to the astonished Mrs. Bunker. 'If she will allow me the pleasure of taking her to my wife.'

THE GENERAL'S BROW RELAXED

There was an equally marked respect in the manner of the men and officers as Mrs. Bunker finally stepped on board the steam tug that was to convey the party across the turbulent bay. But she heeded it not, neither did she take any concern of the still furious gale, the difficult landing, the preternatural activity of the band of sappers, who seemed to work magic with their picks and shovels, the shelter tents that arose swiftly around her, the sheds and bush enclosures that were evoked from the very ground beneath her feet; the wonderful skill, order, and discipline that in a few hours converted her straggling dominion into a formal camp, even to the sentinel, who was already calmly pacing the

rocks by the landing as if he had been doing it for years! Only one thing thrilled her—the sudden outburst, fluttering and snapping of the National flag from her little flagstaff. He would see it—and perhaps be pleased!

And indeed it seemed as if the men had caught the infection of her anxiety, for when her strained eyes could no longer pierce the murky twilight settling over the Gate, one came running to her to say that the look-out had just discovered through his glass a close-reefed schooner running in before the wind. It was her husband, and scarcely an hour after night had shut in the schooner had rounded to off the Point, dropped her boat and sped away to anchorage. And then Mrs. Bunker, running bareheaded down the rocks, breaking in upon the hurried explanation of the officer of the guard, threw herself upon her husband's breast and sobbed and laughed as if her heart would break!

Nor did she scarcely hear his hurried comment to the officer and unconscious corroboration of her story: how a brig had raced them from the Gate, was heading for the bar, but suddenly sheered off and put away to sea again, as if from some signal from the headland. 'Yes—the bluff,' interrupted Captain Jennings bitterly, 'I thought of that, but the old man said it was more diplomatic just now

to *prevent* an attempt than even to successfully resist it.'

But when they were alone again in their little cottage, and Zephas's honest eyes—with no trace of evil knowledge or suspicion in their homely, neutral lightness—were looking into hers with his usual simple trustfulness, Mrs. Bunker trembled, whimpered, and—I grieve to say—basely funked her boasted confession. But here the Deity which protects feminine weakness intervened with the usual miracle. As he gazed at his wife's troubled face, an apologetic cloud came over his rugged but open brow, and a smile of awkward deprecating embarrassment suffused his eyes. 'I declare to goodness, Mollie, but I must tell you suthin, although I guess I didn't kalkilate to say a word about it. But, darn it all, I can't keep it in. No! Lookin' inter that innercent face o' yourn'—pressing her

THREW HERSELF UPON HER HUSBAND'S BREAST

flushing cheeks between his cool brown hands —'and gazing inter them two truthful eyes'— they blinked at this moment with a divine modesty —'and thinkin' of what you've just did for your kentry—like them revolutionary women o' '76— I feel like a darned swab of a traitor myself. Well! what I want ter tell you is this: Ye know, or ye've heard me tell o' that Mrs. Fairfax, as left her husband for that fire-eatin' Marion, and stuck to him through thick and thin, and stood watch and watch with him in this howlin' Southern rumpus they're kickin' up all along the coast, as if she was a man herself. Well, jes as I hauled up at the wharf at 'Frisco, she comes aboard.

'GAZING INTER THEM TWO TRUTHFUL EYES'

"'You're Cap Bunker?' she says.

"'That's me, ma'am,' I says.

"'You're a Northern man and you go with your kind,' sez she; 'but you're a white man, and thar's no cur blood in you.' But you ain't listenin',

Mollie—you're dead tired, lass'—with a commiserating look at her now whitening face—'and I'll haul in line and wait. Well, to cut it short, she wanted me to take her down the coast a bit to where she could join Marion. She said she'd been shook by his friends, followed by spies—and, blame my skin, Mollie, ef that proud woman didn't break down and *cry* like a baby. Now, Mollie, what got *me* in all this, was that them Chivalry folks—ez was always jawin' about their "Southern dames" and their "Ladye fairs," and always runnin' that kind of bilge water outer their scuppers whenever they careened over on a fair wind—was jess the kind to throw off on a woman when they didn't want her, and I kinder thought I'd like *her* to see the difference betwixt the latitude o' Charleston and Cap Cod. So I told her I didn't want the jewelry and dimons she offered me, but if she would come down to the wharf, after dark, I'd smuggle her aboard, and I'd allow to the men that she was *your auntie* ez I was givin' a free passage to! Lord! dear! think o' me takin' the name o' Mollie Bunker's aunt in vain for that sort o' woman! Think o' me,' continued Captain Bunker with a tentative chuckle, 'sort o' pretendin' to hand yo'r auntie to Kernel Marion for—for his lady love! I don't wonder ye's half frighted and half laffin',' he added, as his

wife uttered a hysterical cry; 'it *was* awful! But it worked, and I got her off, and wot's more I got her shipped to Mazatlan, where she'll join Marion, and the two are goin' back to Virginy, where I guess they won't trouble Californy again. Ye know now, deary,' he went on, speaking with difficulty through Mrs. Bunker's clinging arms and fast dripping tears, 'why I didn't heave to to say "good-bye." But it's all over now—I've made a clean breast of it, Mollie—and don't you cry!'

But it was *not* all over. For a moment later Captain Bunker began to fumble in his waistcoat pocket with the one hand that was not clasping his wife's waist. 'One thing more, Mollie; when I left her and refused to take any of her dimons, she put a queer sort o' ring into my hand, and told me with a kind o' mischievious, bedevilin' smile, that I must keep it to remember her by. Here it is—why, Mollie lass! are you crazy?'

She had snatched it from his fingers and was running swiftly from the cottage out into the tempestuous night. He followed closely, until she reached the edge of the rocks. And only then, in the struggling, fast-flying moonlight, she raised a passionate hand, and threw it far into the sea!

As he led her back to the cottage she said she was jealous, and honest Captain Bunker, with his

arm around her, felt himself the happiest man in the world!

* * * * *

From that day the flag flew regularly over the rocky shelf, and, in time, bugles and morning drum-beats were wafted from it to the decks of passing

THE FLAG FLEW REGULARLY OVER THE ROCKY SHELF

ships. For the Federal Government had adjudged the land for its own use, paid Captain Bunker a handsome sum for its possession, and had discreetly hidden the little cottage of Mrs. Bunker and its history for ever behind bastion and casemate.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF BUCKEYE CAMP

PART I

THE tiny lights that had been far scattered and intermittent as fire-flies all along the dark stream, at last dropped out one by one, leaving only the three windows of 'Park's Emporium' to pierce the profoundly wooded banks of the South Fork. So all-pervading was the darkness that the mere opening of the 'Emporium' front door shot out an illuminating shaft which revealed the whole length of the little main street of 'Buckeye,' while the simple passing of a single figure before one of the windows momentarily eclipsed a third of the settlement. This undue pre-eminence given to the only three citizens of Buckeye who were still up at ten o'clock seemed to be hardly justified by their outward appearance, which was that of ordinary long-bearded and long-booted river bar miners. Two sat upon the counter with their hands upon their knees, the third leaned beside the open window.

It was very quiet. The faint, far barking of

a dog, or an occasional subdued murmur from the river shallows, audible only when the wind rose slightly, helped to intensify their solitude. So supreme had it become that when the man at the window at last continued his conversation meditatively, with his face towards it, he seemed to be taking all Nature into his confidence.

'The worst thing about it is, that the only way we can keep her out of the settlement is by the same illegal methods which we deplore in other camps. We have always boasted that Buckeye could get along without Vigilance Committees or Regulators.'

'Yes, and that was because we started it on the principle of original selection, which we are only proposing to continue,' replied one of the men on the counter. 'So there's nothing wrong about our sending a deputation to wait upon her, to protest against her settling here, and give her our reasons.'

'Yes, only it has all the impudence without the pluck of the Regulators. You demand what you are afraid to enforce. Come, Parks, you know she has all the rights on her side. Look at it squarely. She proposes to open a store and sell liquor and cigars, which she serves herself, in the broken-down *Tienda* which was regularly given to her people by the Spanish grantee of the

land we're squatting on. It's not her fault but ours if we've adopted a line of rules, which don't agree with hers, to govern the settlers on *her* land, nor should she be compelled to follow them. Nor because we justify *our* squatting here, on the ground that the Spanish grant isn't confirmed yet, can we forbid her squatting under the same right.'

'But look at the moral question, Brace. Consider the example; the influence of such a shop, kept by such a woman, on the community! We have the right to protect ourselves—the majority.'

'That's the way the lynchers talk,' returned Brace. 'And I'm not so sure about there being any moral question yet. You are assuming too much. There is no reason why she shouldn't run the *Tienda* as decently—barring the liquor sale, which, however, is legal, and for which she can get a licence—as a man could, and without interfering with our morals.'

'Then what is the use of our rules?'

'They were made for those who consented to adopt them, as we all did. They still bind *us*, and if we don't choose to buy her liquor or cigars that will dispose of her and her *Tienda* much more effectually than your protest. It's a pity she's a lone unprotected woman. Now if she only had a husband——'

'She carries a dagger in her garter.'

This apparently irrelevant remark came from the man who had not yet spoken, but who had been listening with the languid unconcern of one who, relinquishing the labour of argument to others, had consented to abide by their decision. It was met with a scornful smile from each of the disputants, perhaps even by an added shrug of the shoulders from the woman's previous defender! *He* was evidently not to be taken in by extraneous sentiment. Nevertheless both listened as the speaker, slowly feeling his knees as if they were his way to a difficult subject, continued with the same suggestion of stating general fact, but waiving any argument himself. 'Clarkson, of Angel's, allows she's got a free, gaudy, picter-covered style with the boys, but that she can be gilt-edged when she wants to. Rowley Meade—him ez hed his skelp pulled over his ears at one stroke, foolin' with a she bear over on Black Mountain—allows it would be rather monotonous in him attemptin' any familiarities with her. Bulstrode's brother, ez was in Marysville, said there was a woman—like to her, but not her—ez made it lively for the boys with a game called "Little Monte," and he dropped a hundred dollars there afore he came away. They do say that about seven men got shot in Marysville on account o'

this one, or from some oneasiness that happened at her shop. But then,' he went on slowly and deferentially as the faces of the two others were lowered and became fixed, '*she* says she tired o' drunken rowdies—there's a sameness about 'em,

'SHE CAN BE GILT-EDGED WHEN SHE WANTS TO'

and it don't sell her pipes and cigars, and that's *why* she's coming here. Thompson, over at Dry Creek, sez that *that's* where our reputation is playin' us! "We've got her as a reward o' virtoo, and be d—d to us." But,' cautiously, 'Thomp-

son ain't drawed a sober breath since Christmas.'

The three men looked in each other's faces in silence. The same thought occurred to each; the profane Thompson was right, and the woman's advent was the logical sequence of their own ethics. Two years previously, the Buckeye Company had found gold on the South Fork, and had taken up claims. Composed mainly of careful, provident, and thoughtful men—some of cultivation and refinement—they had adopted a certain orderly discipline for their own guidance solely, which, however, commended itself to later settlers, already weary of the lawlessness and reckless freedom which usually attended the inception of mining settlements. Consequently the birth of Buckeye was accompanied with no dangerous travail; its infancy was free from the diseases of adolescent communities. The settlers, without any express prohibition, had tacitly dispensed with gambling and drinking saloons; following the unwritten law of example, had laid aside their revolvers, and mingled together peacefully when their labours were ended, without a single peremptory regulation against drinking and playing, or carrying lethal weapons. Nor had there been any test of fitness or qualification for citizenship through previous virtue. There were

one or two gamblers, a skilful duellist, and men who still drank whisky who had voluntarily sought the camp. Of some such antecedents was the last speaker. Probably with two wives elsewhere, and a possible homicidal record, he had modestly held aloof from obtrusive argument.

'Well, we must have a meeting and put the question squarely to the boys to-morrow,' said Parks, gazing thoughtfully from the window. The remark was followed by another long silence. Beyond, in the darkness, Buckeye, unconscious of the momentous question awaiting its decision, slept on peacefully.

'I brought the keg of whisky and brandy from Red Gulch to-day that Doctor Duchesne spoke of,' he resumed presently. 'You know he said we ought to have some in common stock that he could always rely upon in emergencies, and for use after the *tule* fever. I didn't agree with him, and told him how I had brought Sam Denver through an attack with quinine and arrowroot, but he laughed and wanted to know if we'd "resolved" that everybody should hereafter have the Denver constitution. That's the trouble with those old army surgeons—they never can get over the "heroics" of their past. Why he told Parson Jennings that he'd rather treat a man for jim-jams than one that was dying for want of

stimulants. However, the liquor is here, and one of the things we must settle to-morrow is the question if it ought not to be issued only on Duchesne's prescription. When I made that point to him squarely, he grinned again, and wanted to know if I calculated to put the same restriction on the sale of patent medicines and drugs generally.'

''N powder 'n shot,' contributed the indifferent man.

'Perhaps you'd better take a look at the liquor, Saunders,' said Parks, dismissing the ethical question. '*You* know more about it than we do. It ought to be the best.'

Saunders went behind the counter, drew out two demijohns, and, possibly from the force of habit, selected *three* mugs from the crockery and poured some whisky into each, before he could check himself.

'Perhaps we had better compare tastes,' said Brace blandly. They all sipped their liquor slowly and in silence. The decision was favourable. 'Better try some with water to see how it mixes,' said Saunders, lazily filling the glasses with a practised hand. This required more deliberation, and they drew their chairs to the table and sat down. A slight relaxation stole over the thoughtful faces of Brace and Parks, a gentle

perspiration came over the latter's brow, but the features and expression of Saunders never changed. The conversation took a broader range; politics and philosophy entered into it; literature and poetry were discussed by Parks and Brace, Saunders still retaining the air of a dispassionate observer, ready to be convinced, but abstaining from argument—and occasionally replenishing the glasses. There was felt to be no inconsistency between their present attitude and their previous conversation; rather it proved to them that gentlemen could occasionally indulge in a social glass together without frequenting a liquor saloon. This was stated with some degree of effusion by Parks and assented to with singular enthusiasm by Brace; Saunders nodding. It was also observed with great penetration by Brace, that in having really *good*, specially-selected liquor like that, the great danger of the intoshikat'n 'fx —he corrected himself with great deliberation, 'the intoxicating effects'—of adulterated liquors sold in drinking saloons was obviated. Mr. Brace thought also that the vitiated quality of the close air of a crowded saloon had a great deal to do with it—the excess of carbon—hic—he begged their pardon—carbonic acid gas undoubtedly rendered people 'slupid and steepy.' 'But here, from the open window,' he walked dreamily to it

and leaned out admiringly towards the dark landscape that softly slumbered without, 'one could drink in only health and poetry.'

'Wot's that?' said Saunders, looking up.

'I said health and poetry,' returned Brace with some dignity. 'I repeat——'

'No. I mean wot's that noise?' Listen.'

They listened so breathlessly that the soft murmur of the river seemed to flow in upon them. But above it quite distinctly came the regular muffled beat of horse-hoofs in the thick dust and the occasional rattle of wheels over rocky irregularities. But still very far and faint, and fading like the noises in a dream. Brace drew a long breath; Parks smiled and softly closed his eyes. But Saunders remained listening.

'That was over *our* road, near the turnpike!' he said musingly. 'That's queer; thar ain't any of the boys away to-night, and that's a waggon. It's someone comin' here. Hark to that! There it is again.'

It was the same sound but more distinct and nearer, and then was lost again.

'They're dragging through the river sand that's just abreast o' Mallory's. Stopped there, I reckon. No! pushin' on again. Hear 'em' grinding along the gravel over Hamilton's trailin's? Stopped agin—that's before Somerville's shanty.

What's gone o' them now? Maybe they've lost the trail and got onto Gray's slide through the woods. It's no use lookin'; ye couldn't see anything in this nigger dark. Hol' on! If they're comin' through the woods, ye'll hear 'em again jest off here. Yes! by thunder! here they are!'

This time the clatter and horse-hoofs were before them, at the very door. A man's voice cried 'whoa!' and there was a sudden bound on the verandah. The door opened; for an instant the entrance appeared to be filled with a mass of dazzling white flounces, and a figure which from waist to crown was impenetrably wrapped and swathed in black lace. Somewhere beneath its folds, a soft, Spanish, yet somewhat childish voice cried '*Tente*. Hol' on,' turned and vanished. This was succeeded by the apparition of a silent swarthy Mexican, who dropped a small trunk at their feet and vanished also. Then the white flounced and black-laced figure reappeared as the departing waggon rattled away, glided to the centre of the room, placed on the trunk a small foot, whose low-quartered black satin slipper seemed to be held only by the toe, threw back with both hands the black lace mantilla, which was pinned by a red rose over her little right ear and with her hands slightly extended and waving softly said, '*Mira caballeros!* 'Ere we are

"'MIRA CABALLEROS!" 'ERE WE ARE AGAIN, BOYS!'

again, boys! *Viva!* Aow ees your mother? Aow ees that for high? Behold me! just from Pike!'

Parks and Brace, who had partly risen, fell back hopelessly in their chairs again and gazed at the figure with a feeble smile of vacuous pain and politeness. At which it advanced, lowered its black eyes mischievously over the table and the men who sat there, poured out a glass of the liquor, said: 'I look towards you, boys! Don't errise. You are just a leetle weary, eh? A leetle. O yes! a leetle tired of crookin' your elbow—eh? Don't care if the school keep!—eh? Don't want any pie! Want to go 'ome, eh?'

But here Mr. Parks rose with slight difficulty, but unflinching dignity, and leaned impressively over the table, 'May I ashk—may I be permitted to arsk, madam, to what we may owe the pleasure of thish—of this—visit?'

Her face and attitude instantly changed. Her arms dropped and caught up the mantilla with a quick but not ungraceful sweep, and in apparently a single movement she was draped, wrapped, and muffled from waist to crown as before. With a slight inclination of her head, she said in quite another voice: '*Si, Señor.* I have arrive here because in your whole great town of Booki there is not so much as one'—she held up a small brown finger—'as much as *one* leetle light or fire like thees; be-cause in this grand *pueblo* there is not one peoples who have not already sleep in his bed but

thees! *Bueno!* I have arrive all the same like a leetle bird, like the small fly arrive to the light! not to *you*—only to *the light*! I go not to my *casa* for she is dark, and to-night she have nothing to make the fire or bed. I go not to the 'otel—there is not *one*'—the brown finger again uplifted—'otel in Booki! I make the 'otel—the *Fonda*—in my hoose *mañana*—to-morrow! To-night I and Sanchicha make the bed for us 'ere. Sanchicha, she stands herself now over in the street. We have mooch sorrow we have to make the *caballeros* mooch tr-rouble to make disposition of his house. But what will you?'

There was another awkward silence, and then Saunders, who had been examining the intruder with languid criticism, removed his pipe from his mouth and said quietly:—

'That's the woman you're looking for—Jovita Mendez!'

PART II

THE rest of that interview has not been recorded. Suffice it that a few minutes later Parks, Brace, and Saunders left the Emporium, and passed the night in the latter's cabin, leaving the Emporium in possession of Miss Mendez and her *peon* servant; that at the earliest dawn the two women and their baggage were transferred to the

MISS MENDEZ

old *adobe* house, where, however, a Mexican workman had already arrived, and with a basket-

full of red tiles was making it habitable. Buckeye, which was popularly supposed to sleep with one eye on the river, and always first repaired there in the morning to wash and work, was only awake to the knowledge of the invasion at noon. The meeting so confidently spoken of the night before had *not* been called. Messrs. Parks and Brace were suffering from headaches—undoubtedly a touch of *tule* chill. Saunders, at work with his partner in Eagle Bar, was as usual generous with apparently irrelevant facts on all subjects—but that of the strangers. It would seem as if the self-constituted Committee of Safety had done nothing.

And nothing whatever seemed to happen! Thompson, of Angels, smoking a meditative pipe at noon on the trail, noticed the repairing of the old *adobe* house, casually spoke of it on his return to his work, without apparent concern or exciting any comment. The two Billinger brothers saw Jovita Mendez at the door of her house an hour later, were themselves seen conversing with her by Jim Barker, but on returning to their claim, neither they nor Barker exhibited any insurrectionary excitement. Later on, Shuttleworth was found in possession of two bundles of freshly-rolled corn-husk cigarettes, and promised to get his partner some the next day, but that gentleman

anticipated him. By nightfall nearly all Buckeye had passed in procession before the little house without exhibiting any indignation or protest. That night, however, it seemed as if the events for which the Committee was waiting were really impending. The adult female population of Buckeye consisted of seven women—wives of miners. That they would submit tamely to the introduction of a young, pretty, and presumably dangerous member of their own sex was not to be supposed. But whatever protest they made did not pass beyond their conjugal seclusion, and was apparently not supported by their husbands. Two or three of them, under the pretext of sympathy o sex, secured interviews with the fair intruder, the result of which was not, however, generally known But a few days later Mrs. 'Bob' Carpenter—a somewhat brick-dusty blonde—was observed wear ing some black netting and a heavily-flounced skirt, and Mrs. Shuttleworth in her next visit to Fiddletown wore her Paisley shawl affixed to he chestnut hair by a bunch of dog roses, and wrapped like a plaid around her waist. The seven ladies of Buckeye, who had never before met, except on domestic errands to each other's houses o on Sunday attendance at the 'First Methodis Church' at Fiddletown, now took to walking together, or in their husbands' company, along the

upper bank of the river—the one boulevard of Buckeye. The third day after Miss Mendez's arrival they felt the necessity of immediate shopping expeditions to Fiddletown. This operation had hitherto been confined to certain periods, and restricted to the laying in of stores of rough household stuffs; but it now apparently included a wider range and more ostentatious quality. Parks' Emporium no longer satisfied them, and this unexpected phase of the situation was practically brought home to the proprietor in the necessity of extending the more inoffensive and peaceful part of his stock. And when, towards the end of the week, a cartload of pretty fixtures, mirrors, and furniture arrived at the *Tienda*, there was a renewed demand at the Emporium for articles not in stock, and the consequent diverting of custom to Fiddletown. Buckeye found itself face to face with a hitherto undreamt of and preposterous proposition. It seemed that the advent of the strange woman, without having yet produced any appreciable effect upon the men, had already insidiously inveigled the adult female population into ostentatious extravagance.

At the end of a week the little *adobe* house was not only rendered habitable, but was even made picturesque by clean white curtains at its barred windows, and some bright, half Moorish

colouring of beams and rafters. Nearly the whole ground floor was given up to the saloon of the *Tienda*, which consisted of a small counter at one side, containing bottles and glasses, and another, flanking it, with glass cases, containing cigars, pipes, and tobacco, while the centre of the room was given up to four or five small restaurant tables. The staff of Jovita was no longer limited to Sanchicha, but had been augmented by a little old man of indefinite antiquity who resembled an Aztec idol, and an equally old Mexican, who looked not unlike a brown-tinted and veined tobacco leaf himself, and might have stood for a sign. But the genius of the place, its omnipresent and all-pervading goddess, was Jovita! Smiling, joyous, indefatigable in suavity and attention; all-embracing in her courtesies; frank of speech and eye; quick at repartee and deftly handling the slang of the day and the locality with a childlike appreciation and an infantine accent that seemed to redeem it from vulgarity or unfeminine boldness! Few could resist the volatile infection of her presence. A smile was the only tribute she exacted, and good-humour the rule laid down for her guests. If it occasionally required some mental agility to respond to her banter, a Californian gathering was, however, seldom lacking in humour. Yet she was always the principal per-

former to an admiring audience. Perhaps there was security in this multitude of admirers; perhaps there was a saving grace in this humorous trifling. The passions are apt to be serious and solitary, and Jovita evaded them with a jest—which, if not always delicate or witty, was effective in securing the laughter of the majority and the jealousy of none.

At the end of the week another peculiarity was noticed. There was a perceptible increase of the Mexican population, who had always hitherto avoided Buckeye. On Sunday an Irish priest from El Pásto said Mass in a patched-up corner of the old Mission ruin opposite Rollinson's Ford. A few lounging 'Excelsior' boys were equally astonished to see Jovita's red rose crest and black mantilla glide by, and followed her unvarying smile and jesting salutation up to the shadow of the crumbling portal. At Vespers nearly all Buckeye, hitherto virtuously sceptical and good-humouredly secure in Works without Faith, made a point of attending; it was alleged by some to see if Jovita's glossy Indian-inky eyes would suffer aberration in her devotions. But the rose-crested head was never lifted from the well-worn prayer-book or the brown hands which held a certain poor little cheap rosary like a child's string of battered copper coins. Buckeye lounged by the wall

through the service with respectful tolerance and uneasy shifting legs, and came away. But the apparently simple event did not end there. It was unconsciously charged with a tremendous import to the settlement. For it was discovered the next day by Mrs. 'Bob' Carpenter and Nan Shuttleworth that the Methodist Church at Fiddletown was too far away, and Buckeye ought to have a preacher of its own. Seats were fitted up in the loft of Carpenter's store house, where the Reverend Henry McCorkle held divine service, and instituted a Bible class. At the end of two weeks it appeared that Jovita's invasion—which was to bring dissipation and ruin to Buckeye—had indirectly brought two churches! A chilling doubt like a cold mist settled along the river. As the two rival processions passed on the third Sunday, Jo Bateman, who had been in the habit of reclining on that day in his shirt-sleeves under a tree, with a novel in his hand, looked gloomily after them. Then knocking the ashes from his pipe, he rose, shook hands with his partners, said apologetically that he had lately got into the habit of *respecting the Sabbath*, and was too old to change again, and so shook the red dust of Buckeye from his feet and departed.

As yet there had not been the slightest evidence of disorderly conduct on the part of the

fair proprietress of the *Tienda*, nor her customers, nor any drunkenness or riotous disturbance that could be at all attributed to her presence. There was, it is true, considerable hilarity, smoking, and some gambling there until a late hour, but this could not be said to interfere with the rest and comfort of other people. A clue to the mystery of so extraordinary a propriety was given by Jovita herself. One day she walked into Parks' Emporium and demanded an interview with the proprietor.

'You have made the rules for thees Booki?'

'Yes—that is—I and my friends have.'

'And when one shall not have mind the rule—when one have say: "No! damn the rule," what shall you make to him? Shall you aprison him?'

Mr. Parks hastened to say with a superior, yet engaging smile that it never had been necessary, as the rules were obligatory upon the honour and consent of all—and were never broken. 'Except,' he added, still more engagingly, 'she would remember, in her case—with their consent.'

'And your *caballeros* break not the rules?'

'No.'

'Then they shall not break the rules of me—at *my Tienda*! Look! I have made the rule that I shall not have a *caballero* drunk at my house; I have made the rule that I shall not sell him the

aguardiente when he have too mooch. I have made the rule that when he gamble too mooch, when he put up too mooch money, I say "No!" I will not that he shall! I make one more rule: that he shall not quarrel nor fight in my house. When he quarrel and fight, I say "Go! *Vamos!* Get out!"'

'And very good rules they are too, Miss Mendez.'

Jovita fixed her shining black eyes on the smiling Parks. 'And when he say: "No, nevarre, damn the rules!" When he come drunk, remain drunk, play high and fight, *you* will not poonish him? *you* will not take him out?'

'Well, you see, the fact is, I have not the power.'

'Are you not the Alcalde?'

'No. There is a Justice of the Peace at Fiddletown, but even he could do nothing to enforce your rules. But if anything should happen you can make a complaint to him.'

'*Bueno.* You have not the power; *I* have. I make not the complaint to Fiddletown. I make the complaint to José Perez, to Manuel, to Antonio, to Sanchicha—she is a strong one! I say "Chook him out." They chook him out! they remove him! He does not r-r-remain. Enough. *Bueno. Gracias, Señor*, good-a-bye!'

She was gone. For the next four days Parks was in a state of some anxiety—but it appeared unnecessarily so. Whether the interview had become known along the river did not transpire, but there seemed to be no reason for Miss Mendez to enforce her rules. It was said that once, when Thompson, of Angels, was a little too noisy, he had been quietly conducted by his friends from the *Tienda* without the intervention of José. The frequenters of the saloon became its police.

Yet the event—long protracted—came at last! It was a dry, feverish, breezeless afternoon, when the short, echoless explosion of a revolver puffed out on the river, followed by another, delivered so rapidly that they seemed rolled into one. There was no mistaking that significant repetition. *One* shot might have been an accident; *two* meant intention. The men dropped their picks and shovels and ran—ran as they never before ran in Buckeye—ran mechanically, blindly groping at their belts and pockets for the weapons that hung there no longer; ran aimlessly, as to purpose, but following instinctively with hurried breath and quivering nostrils the cruel scent of powder and blood. Ran until, reaching the *Tienda*, the foremost stumbled over the body of Shuttleworth; came upon the half-sitting, half-leaning figure of Saunders against its *adobe* wall! The

doors were barred and closed, and even as the crowd charged furiously forward, a window was sharply shut above, in their very face.

'Stand back, gentlemen! Lift him up. What's the row? What is it, Saunders? Who, did it? Speak, man!'

But Saunders, who was still supporting himself against the wall, only looked at them with a singular and half-apologetic smile, and then leaned forward as if to catch the eye of Shuttleworth, who was recovering consciousness in the uplifted arms of his companions. But neither spoke.

'It's some d—d Greaser[1] inside!' said Thompson, with sudden ferocity. 'Some of her cursed crew! Break down the doors, boys!'

'Stop!'

It was the voice of Shuttleworth, speaking with an effort. He was hard hit, somewhere in the groin; pain and blood were coming with consciousness and movement, and his face was ghastly. Yet there was the same singular smile of embarrassment which Saunders had worn, and a touch of invincible disgust in his voice as he stammered quickly, 'Don't be d—d fools! It's no one in *there*. It's only me and *him*! He'll tell you that. Won't you, Saunders?'

'Yes,' said Saunders, leaning anxiously

[1] 'Greaser'—*i.e.* Mexican.

SAUNDERS LOOKED AT THEM WITH A SINGULAR SMILE

forward, with a brightening face. 'D—n it all—can't you see? It's only—only us.'

'You and me, that's all,' repeated Shuttleworth, with a feverish laugh. 'Only our d—d foolishness! Think of it, boys! He gave me the lie, and I drew!'

'Both of us full, you know—reg'lar beasts,' said Saunders, sinking back against the wall. 'Kick me, somebody, and finish me off.'

'I don't see any weapons here,' said Brace gravely, examining the ground.

'They're inside,' said Shuttleworth with tremulous haste. 'We began it in there—just like hogs, you know! Didn't we, Saunders?' bitterly.

'You bet,' said Saunders faintly. 'Reg'lar swine.'

Parks looked graver still, and as he passed a handkerchief around the wounded man's thigh, said: 'But I don't see where you got your pistols, and how you got out here.'

'Clinched, you know; sorter rolled over out *here*—and—and—oh, d—n it—don't talk!'

'He means,' said Shuttleworth still feebly, 'that we—we—grabbed *another man's* six-shooter and—and—he that is—and they—he—he and me grabbed each other, and—don't you see—?' but here, becoming more involved and much weaker, he discreetly fainted away.

And that was all Buckeye ever knew of the affair! For they refused to speak of it again, and Dr. Duchesne gravely forbade any further interrogation. Both men's revolvers were found undischarged in their holsters, hanging in their respective cabins. The balls which were afterwards extracted from the two men singularly disappeared; Dr. Duchesne asserting with a grim smile that they had swallowed them.[1]

Nothing could be ascertained of the facts at the *Tienda*, which at that hour of the day appeared to have been empty of customers, and was occupied only by Miss Mendez and her retainers. All surmises as to the real cause of the quarrel and the reason for the reticence of the two belligerents were suddenly and unexpectedly stopped by their departure from Buckeye as soon as their condition permitted, on the alleged opinion of Dr. Duchesne that the air of the river was dangerous to their convalescence. The momentary indignation against the *Tienda* which the two combatants had checked, eventually subsided altogether. After all, the fight had taken place *outside*; it was not even proven that the provocation had been given *at* the *Tienda*! Its popularity was undiminished.

[1] It was a frontier superstition that the ball extracted from a gunshot wound, if swallowed by the wounded man, prevented inflammation or any supervening complications.

PART III

It was the end of the rainy season, and a wet night. Brace and Parks were looking from the window over the swollen river, with faces quite as troubled as the stream below. Nor was the prospect any longer the same. In the past two years Buckeye had grown into a city. They could now count a half-dozen church spires from the window of the three-storied brick building which had taken the place of the old wooden 'Emporium,' but they could also count the brilliantly-lit windows of an equal number of saloons and gambling-houses which glittered through the rain, or, to use the words of a local critic, 'Shone seven nights in the week to the Gospel shops' *one*!' A difficulty had arisen which the two men had never dreamed of, and a struggle had taken place between the two rival powers, which was developing a degree of virulence and intolerance on both sides that boded no good to Buckeye. The disease which its infancy had escaped, had attacked its adult growth with greater violence. The new American saloons which competed with Jovita Mendez's Spanish venture had substituted a brutal masculine sincerity for her veiled feminine methods. There was higher play, deeper drinking, darker passion

Yet the opposition, after the fashion of most reformers, were casting back to the origin of the trouble in Jovita, and were confounding principles and growth. 'If it had not been for her the rule would never have been broken.' 'If there was to be a cleaning out of the gambling houses, she must go first!'

The sounds of a harp and a violin played in the nearest saloon struggled up to them with the opening and shutting of its swinging baize inner doors. There was boisterous chanting from certain belated revellers in the next street which had no such remission. The brawling of the stream below seemed to be echoed in the uneasy streets; the quiet of the old days had departed with the sedate, encompassing woods that no longer fringed the river bank; the restful calm of Nature had receded before the dusty outskirts of the town.

'It's mighty unfortunate, too,' said Brace moodily, 'that Shuttleworth and Saunders, who haven't been in the place since their row, have come over from Fiddletown to-day and are hanging around town. They haven't said anything that I know of, but their *presence* is quite enough to revive the old feeling against her shop. The Committee,' he added bitterly, 'will be sure to say that not only the first gambling, but the first

shooting in Buckeye took place there. If they get up that story again—no matter how quiet *she* has become since—no matter what *you* may say as Mayor—it will go hard with her. What's that now?'

They listened breathlessly. Above the brawling of the river, the twanging of the harp-players, and the receding shouts of the revellers, they could hear the hollow wooden sidewalks resounding with the dull, monotonous trampling of closely following feet. Parks rose with a white face.

'Brace!'

'Yes!'

'Will you stand by me—and *her*?'

'Stand by *you and her*?' Eh? What? Good God! Parks!—you don't mean to say you—it's gone as far as *that*?'

'Will you or won't you?'

The sound of the trampling had changed to a shuffling on the pavement below, and then footsteps began to ascend the stairs.

Brace held out his hand quickly and grasped that of Parks as the door opened to half a dozen men. They were evidently the ringleaders of the crowd below. There was no hesitation or doubt in their manner; the unswerving directness which always characterised those illegal demonstrations lent it something of dignity. Nevertheless,

Carpenter, the spokesman, flushed slightly before Parks's white, determined face.

'Come, Parks, you know what we're after,' he said bluntly. 'We didn't come here to parley. We knew *your* sentiments and what *you* think is your duty. We know what we consider *ours*—and so do you. But we're here to give you a chance, either as Mayor, or, if you prefer it, as the oldest citizen here, to take a hand in our business to-night. We're not ashamed of what we're going to do, and we're willing to abide by it; so there's no reason why we shouldn't speak above board of it to you. We even invite you to take part in our last "call" to-night at the Hall.'

'Go!' whispered Brace quickly, '*you'll gain time!*'

Parks's face changed, and he turned to Carpenter. 'Enough,' he said gravely. 'I reserve what I have to say of these proceedings till I join you there.' He stopped, whispered a few words to Brace, and then disappeared as the men descended the stairs, and, joining the crowd on the pavement, proceeded silently towards the Town Hall. There was nothing in the appearance of that decorous procession to indicate its unlawful character or the recklessness with which it was charged.

There were thirty or forty men already seated in

the Hall. The meeting was brief and to the point. The gambling saloons were to be 'cleaned out' that night, the tables and appliances thrown into the street and burnt, the doors closed, and the gamblers were to be conducted to the outskirts of the town and forbidden to enter it again on pain of death.

'Does this yer refer to Jovita Mendez's saloon?' asked a voice.

To their surprise the voice was not Parks's, but Shuttleworth's. It was also a matter to be noted that he stood a little forward of the crowd, and that there was a corresponding movement of a dozen or more men from Fiddletown who apparently were part of the meeting.

The chairman (No. 10), said there was to be no exception, and certainly not for the originator of disorder in Buckeye! He was surprised that the question should be asked by No. 72, who was an old resident of Buckeye, and who, with No. 73, had suffered from the character of that woman's saloon.

'That's jest it,' said Shuttleworth, 'and ez I reckon that *Saunders and me* did all the disorder there was, and had to turn ourselves out o' town on account of it, I don't see jest where *she* could come into this affair. Only,' he turned and looked around him, 'in one way! And that way, gentle-

men, would be for her to come here and boot one-half o' this kempany out o' town, and shoot the other half! You hear me!—that's so!' He stopped, tugged a moment at his cravat and loosened his shirt-collar as if it impeded his utterance, and went on. 'I've got to say suthin' to you gentlemen about me and Saunders and this woman; I've got to say suthin' that's hard for a white man to say, and him a married man, too—I've got to say that me and Saunders never had no *qu'oll*, never had *no fight* at her shop: I've got to say that me and Saunders got shot by Jovita Mendez for *insultin' her*—for tryin' to treat her as if she was the common dirt of the turnpike—and served us right! I've got to say that Saunders and me made a bet that for all her airs she wasn't no better than she might be, and we went there drunk to try her—and that we got left, with two shots into us like hounds as we were! That's so!—wasn't it, Saunders?'

'With two shots inter us like hounds ez we were,' repeated Saunders with deliberate precision.

'And I've got to say suthin' more, gen'lemen,' continued Shuttleworth, now entirely removing his coat and vest, and apparently shaking himself free from any extraneous trammels. 'I've got to say this—I've got to say that thar ain't a man in

Buckeye—from Dirty Dick over yon to the Mayor of this town, ez hasn't tried the same thing on and got left—got left, without shootin' may be, more's the pity, but got left all the same! And I've got to say,' lifting his voice, '*that of that's what you call disorderliness in her*—if that's what yo'r turnin' this woman out o' town for—why——'

He stopped, absolutely breathless and gasping. For there was a momentary shock of surprise and shame, and then he was overborne by peal after peal of inextinguishable laughter. But it was the laughter that precipitated doubt, enlightened justice, cleared confusion, and—saved them!

In vain a few struggled to remind them that the question of the *other* saloons was still unaffected. It was lost in the motion enthusiastically put and carried that the Committee should instantly accompany Saunders and Shuttleworth to Jovita's saloon to make an apology in their presence. Five minutes later they halted hilariously before its door. But it was closed, dark and silent!

Their sudden onset and alarm brought Sanchicha to the half-opened door. 'Ah, yes! the *Señorita*? *Bueno!* She had just left for Fiddletown with the Señor Parks, the honourable Mayor. They had been married only a few moments before by the Reverend Mr. McCorkle!'

THEIR UNCLE FROM CALIFORNIA

PART I

It was bitterly cold. When night fell over Lakeville, Wisconsin, the sunset, which had flickered rather than glowed in the western sky, took upon itself a still more boreal tremulousness, until at last it seemed to fade away in cold blue shivers to the zenith. Nothing else stirred; in the crisp still air the evening smoke of chimneys rose threadlike and vanished. The stars were early, pale, and pitiless; when the later moonlight fell, it appeared only to whiten the stiffened earth like snow, except where it made a dull, pewter-like film over the three frozen lakes which encompassed the town.

The site of the town itself was rarely beautiful, and its pioneers and founders had carried out the suggestions they had found there with loving taste and intelligence. Themselves, old *voyageurs*, trappers, and traders, they still loved Nature too well to exclude her from the restful homes they had achieved after years of toiling face to face with her. So a strip of primeval forest on the

one side, and rolling level prairie on the other, still came up to the base of the hill, whereon they had built certain solid houses, which a second generation had beautified and improved with modern taste, but which still retained their old honesty of foundation aad wholesome rustic space. These yet stood among the old trees, military squares, and broad sloping avenues of the town. Seen from the railway by day, the regularity of streets and blocks was hidden by environing trees; there remained only a picturesque lifting of rustic gardens, brown roofs, gables, spires, and cupolas above the mirroring lake: seen from the railway this bitter night, the invisible terraces and streets were now pricked out by symmetrical lines and curves of sparkling lights, which glittered through the leafless boughs and seemed to encircle the hill like a diadem.

Central in the chiefest square, and yet preserving its old lordly isolation in a wooded garden, the homestead of Enoch Lane stood with all its modern additions and improvements. Already these included not only the latest phases of decoration, but various treasures brought by the second generation from Europe, which they were wont to visit, but from which they always contentedly returned to their little provincial town. Whether there was some instinctive yearning, like

the stirred sap of great forests, in their wholesome pioneer blood, or whether there was some occult fascination in the pretty town-crested hill itself, it was still certain that the richest inhabitants always preferred to live in Lakeville. Even the young, who left it to seek their fortune elsewhere, came back to enjoy their success under the sylvan vaults of this vast ancestral roof. And that was why, this 22nd of December, 1870, the whole household of Gabriel Lane was awaiting the arrival from California of his brother, Sylvester Lane, at the old homestead which he had left twenty years ago.

'And you don't know how he looks?' said Kitty Lane to her father.

'I do, perfectly; rather chubby, with blue eyes, curly hair, fair skin, and blushes when you speak to him.'

'Papa!'

'Eh?—Oh, well, he *used* to. You see that was twenty-five years ago, when he left here for boarding-school. He ran away from there, as I told you; went to sea, and finally brought up at San Francisco.'

'And you haven't had any picture, or photograph of him, since?'

'No—that is—I say!—you haven't, any of you, got a picture of Sylvester, have you?'—he turned

in a vague parenthetical appeal to the company of relatives and friends collected in the drawing-room after dinner.

'Cousin Jane has; she knows all about him!'

But it appeared that Cousin Jane had only heard Susan Marckland say that Edward Bingham had told her that he was in California when 'Uncle Sylvester' had been nearly hanged by a Vigilance Committee for protecting a horse thief or a gambler, or some such person. This was felt to be ineffective as a personal description.

'He's sure to wear a big beard; they all do when they first come back,' said Amos Gunn, with metropolitan oraculousness.

'He has a big curling moustache, long silken hair, and broad shoulders,' said Marie du Page.

There was such piquant conviction in the manner of the speaker, who was also a very pretty girl, that they all turned towards her, and Kitty quickly said—

'But *you've* never seen him?'

'No—but——' She stopped, and, lifting one shoulder, threw her spirited head sideways, in a pretty deprecatory way, with elevated eyebrows and an expression intended to show the otherwise untranslatable character of her impression. But it showed quite as pleasantly the other fact, that she was the daughter of a foreigner, an old French

military explorer, and that she had retained even in Anglo-Saxon Lakeville some of the Gallic animation.

'Well, how many of you girls are going with me to meet him at the station?' said Gabriel, dismissing with masculine promptness the lesser question. 'It's time to be off.'

'I'd like to go,' said Kitty, 'and so would Cousin Jane; but really, papa, you see if *you* don't know him, and *we* don't either, and you've got to satisfy yourself that it's the right man, and then introduce *yourself* and then us—and all this on the platform before everybody—it makes it rather embarrassing for us. And then, as he's your younger brother and we're supposed to be his affectionate nieces, you know, it would make *him* feel *so* ridiculous!'

'And if he were to *kiss* you,' said Marie, tragically, 'and then turn out not to be him!'

'So,' continued Kitty, 'you'd better take Uncle John, who was more in Uncle Sylvester's time, to represent the Past of the family, and perhaps Mr. Gunn——'

'To represent the future, I suppose?' interrupted Gabriel, in a wicked whisper.

'To represent a name that most men of the world in New York and San Francisco know,' went on Kitty, without a blush. 'It would make

recognition and introduction easier. And take an extra fur with you, dear—not for *him* but for yourself. I suppose he's lived so much in the open air as to laugh at our coddling.'

'I don't know about that,' said her father, thoughtfully; 'the last telegram I have from him, en route, says he's half frozen, and wants a close carriage sent to the station.'

'Of course,' said Marie, impatiently, 'you forget the poor creature comes from burning cañons and hot golden sands and perpetual sunshine.'

'Very well; but come along, Marie, and see how I've prepared his room,' and as her father left the drawing-room Kitty carried off her old schoolfellow upstairs.

The room selected for the coming Sylvester had been one of the elaborate guest-chambers, but was now stripped of its more luxurious furniture and arranged with picturesque yet rural extravagance. A few rare buffalo, bear, and panther skins were disposed over the bare floor, and even displayed gracefully over some elaborately rustic chairs. The handsome French bedstead had been displaced for a small wrought-iron ascetic-looking couch covered with a gorgeously striped Mexican blanket. The fireplace had been dismantled of its steel grate, and the hearth extended so as to

allow a pile of symmetrically heaped moss-covered hickory logs to take its place. The walls were covered with trophies of the chase, buck horns and deer heads, and a number of Indian arrows stood in a sheaf in the corners beside a few modern guns and rifles.

"Perfectly lovely,' said Marie, 'but'—with a slight shiver of her expressive shoulders—'a little cold and outdoorish, eh?'

'Nonsense,' returned Kitty dictatorially, 'and if he *is* cold—he can easily light those logs. They always build their open fires under a tree. Why even Mr. Gunn used to do that when he was camping out in the Adirondacks last summer. I call it perfectly comfortable and *so* natural.' Nevertheless, they had both tucked their chilly hands under the fleecy shawls they had snatched from the hall for this hyperborean expedition.

'You have taken much pains for him, Kaitee,' said Marie, with her faintest foreign intonation. 'You will like this strange uncle—you?'

'He is a wonderful man, Marie; he's been everywhere, seen everything, and done everything out there. He's fought duels, been captured by Indians and tied to a stake to be tortured. He's been leader of a Vigilance Committee, and they say that he has often shot and killed men himself. I'm afraid he's been rather wicked, you know.

He's lived alone in the woods like a hermit without seeing a soul, and then, again, he's been a chief among the Indians, with Heaven knows how many Indian wives! They called him "The Pale-faced Thunderbolt," my dear, and "The Young Man who Swallows the Lightning," or something like that.'

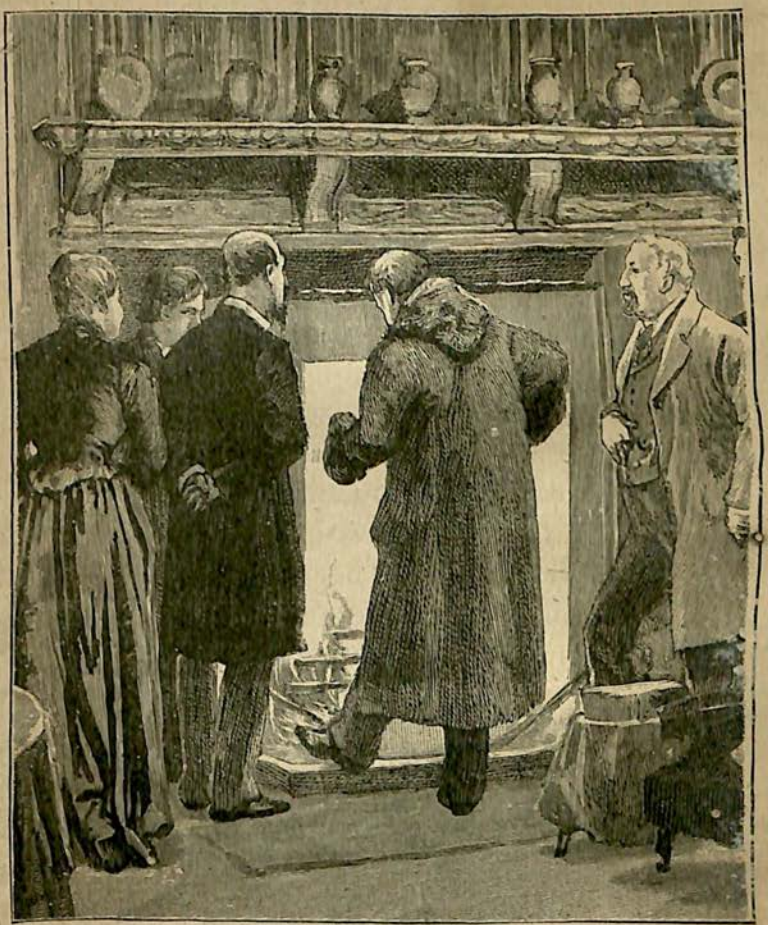
'And what can he want here?' asked Marie.

'To see us, my dear,' said Kitty, loftily; 'and then, too, he has to settle something about *his* share of the property; for you know grandpa left a share of it to him. Not that he's ever bothered himself about it, for he's rich—a kind of Monte Cristo, you know—with a gold mine and an island off the coast, to say nothing of a whole county that he owns, that is called after him, and millions of wild cattle that he rides among and lassoes! It's dreadfully hard to do. You know you take a long rope with a slip-knot, and you throw it around your head so, and——'

'Hark!' said Marie, with a dramatic start, and her finger on her small mouth, 'he comes!'

There was the clear roll of wheels along the smooth, frozen carriage sweep towards the house, the sharp crisp click of hoofs on stone, the opening of heavy doors, the sudden sparkling invasion of frigid air, the uplifting of voices in greeting—but all familiar! There were Gabriel Lane's

cheery, hopeful tones, the soprano of Cousin Jane and Cousin Emma, the baritone of Mr. Gunn, and the grave measured oratorical utterance of Parson Dexter, who had joined the party at the station; but certainly the accents of no *stranger*. Had he come? Yes, for his name was just then called, and the quick ear of Marie had detected a light, lounging, alien footstep cross the cold strip of marble vestibule. The two girls exchanged a rapid glance; each looked into the mirror, and then interrogatively at the other, nodded their heads affirmatively, and descended to the drawing-room. A group had already drawn round the fire, and a small central figure, who, with its back turned towards them, was still enwrapped in an enormous overcoat of rich fur, was engaged in presenting an alternate small varnished leather boot to the warmth of the grate. As they entered the room the heavy fur was yielded up with apparent reluctance, and revealed to the astonished girls a man of ordinary stature with a slight and elegant figure set off by a travelling suit of irreproachable cut. His light reddish-yellow hair, moustache, and sunburned cheek, which seemed all of one colour and outline, made it impossible to detect the grey of the one or the hollowness of the other, and gave no indication of his age. Yet there was clearly no mistake. Here was Gabriel Lane



A GROUP HAD ALREADY DRAWN ROUND THE FIRE

seizing their nervously cold fingers and presenting them to their ‘ Uncle Sylvester.’

Far from attempting to kiss Kitty, the stranger for an instant seemed oblivious of the little hand she offered him in the half-preoccupied bow he gave her. But Marie was not so easily passed over, and, with her audacious face challenging his, he abstractedly imparted to the shake of her hand something of the fervour that he should have shown his relative. And, then, still warming his feet on the fender, he seemed to have forgotten them both.

'Accustomed as you have been, sir,' said the Reverend Mr. Dexter, seizing upon an awkward silence, and accenting it laboriously, 'perhaps I should say *inured* as you have been to the exciting and stirring incidents of a lawless and adventurous community, you doubtless find in a pastoral, yet cultivated and refined, seclusion like Lakeville a degree of——'

'Oh, several degrees,' said Uncle Sylvester, blandly flicking bits of buffalo hair from his well-fitting trousers; 'it's colder, you know—much colder.'

'I was referring to a less material contrast,' continued Mr. Dexter, with a resigned smile; 'yet, as to the mere question of cold, I am told, sir, that in California there are certain severe regions of altitude—although the mean temperature——'

'I suppose out in California you fellows would say our temperature was a darned sight *meaner*, eh?' broke in Amos Gunn, with a confidential glance at the others, as if offering a humorous diversion suited to the Californian taste. Uncle Sylvester did not, however, smile. Gazing critically at Gunn, he said thoughtfully: 'I think not; I've even known men killed for saying less than that,' and turned to the clergyman. 'You are quite right; some of the higher passes are very cold. I was lost in one of them in '56 with a small party. We were seventy miles from any settlement, we had had nothing to eat for thirty-six hours; our camp fire, melting the snow, sank twelve feet below the surface.' The circle closed eagerly around him, Marie, Kitty, and Cousin Jane pressing forward with excited faces; even the clergyman assumed an expression of profound interest. 'A man by the name of Thompson, I think,' continued Uncle Sylvester, thoughtfully gazing at the fire, 'was frozen a few yards away. Towards morning, having been fifty-eight hours without food, our last drop of whisky exhausted, and the fire extinguished, we found——'

'Yes, yes!' said half a dozen voices.

'We found,' continued Uncle Sylvester, rubbing his hands cheerfully, 'we found it—exceedingly cold. Yes—*exceedingly* cold!'

There was a dead silence.

'But you escaped!' said Kitty, breathlessly.

'I think so. I think we all escaped—that is, except Thompson, if his name *was* Thompson; it might have been Parker,' continued Uncle Sylvester, gazing with a certain languid astonishment on the eager faces around him.

'But *how* did you escape?'

'Oh, somehow! I don't remember exactly. I don't think,' he went on reflectively, 'that we had to eat Thompson—if it was *him*—at least not then. No'—with a faint effort of recollection—'that would have been another affair. Yes,' assuringly to the eager, frightened eyes of Cousin Jane, 'you are quite right, that was something altogether different. Dear me; one quite mixes up these things. Eh?'

A servant had entered, and after a hurried colloquy with Gabriel, the latter turned to Uncle Sylvester—

'Excuse me, but I think there must be some mistake! We brought up your luggage with you —two trunks—in the station waggon. A man has just arrived with three more, which he says are yours.'

'There should be five in all, I think,' said Uncle Sylvester, thoughtfully.

'Maybe there are, sir, I didn't count exactly,' said the servant.

'All right,' said Uncle Sylvester, cheerfully, turning to his brother. 'You can put them in my room or on the landing, except two marked 'L' in a triangle. They contain some things I picked up for you and the girls. We'll look them over in the morning. And, if you don't mind, I'll excuse myself now and go to bed.'

'But it's only half-past ten,' said Gabriel, remonstratingly. 'You don't, surely, go to bed at half-past ten?'

'I do when I travel. Travel is *so* exhausting. Good-night! Don't let anybody disturb themselves to come with me.'

He bowed languidly to the company, and disappeared with a yawn gracefully disguised into a parting smile.

'Well!' said Cousin Jane, drawing a long breath.

'I don't believe it's your Uncle Sylvester at all!' said Marie vivaciously. 'It's some trick that Gabriel is playing upon us. And he's not even a good actor—he forgets his part.'

'And, then, five trunks for one single man! Heavens! what can he have in them?' said Cousin Emma.

'Perhaps his confederates, to spring out upon us at night, after everybody's asleep.'

'Are you sure you remembered him, papa?' said Kitty, *sotto voce*.

'Certainly. And, my dear child, he knows all the family history as well as you do; and'—continued her father with a slight laugh, that did not, however, conceal a certain seriousness that was new to him—'I only wish I understood as much about the property as he does. By the way, Amos,' he broke off, suddenly, turning to the young man, 'he seemed to know your people.'

'Most men in the financial world do,' said Gunn, a little superciliously.

'Yes; but he asked me if you hadn't a relative of some kind in Southern California or Mexico.'

A slight flush—so slight that only the keen, vivaciously observant eyes of Marie noticed it—passed over the young man's face.

'I believe it is a known fact that our branch of the family never emigrated from their native town,' he said emphatically. 'The Gunns were rather peculiar and particular in that respect.'

'Then there were no offshoots from the old *stock*,' said Gabriel.

Nevertheless, this pet joke of Gabriel's did not dissipate the constraint and disappointment left upon the company by Uncle Sylvester's unsatisfying performance and early withdrawal, and they

separated soon after, Kitty and Marie being glad to escape upstairs together. On the landing they met two of the Irish housemaids in a state of agitated exhaustion. It appeared that the 'sthrange gintleman' had requested that his bed be remade from bedclothes and bedding *always carried with him in his trunks!* From their apologetic tone it was evident that he had liberally rewarded them. 'Shure, Miss,' protested Norah, in deprecation of Kitty's flashing eye, 'there's thim that's lived among shnakes and poysin riptiles and faverous disayses that's particklar av the beds and sheets they lie on. Hisht! Howly Mother! it's something else he's wanting now!'

The door of Uncle Sylvester's room had slowly opened, and a blue pyjama'd sleeve appeared, carefully depositing the sheaf of bows and arrows outside the door. 'I say, Norah, or Bridget there, some of you take those infernal things away. And look out, will you, for the arrow-heads are deadly poison. The fool who got 'em didn't know they were African, and not Indian at all! And hold on!' The hand vanished, and presently reappeared holding two rifles. 'And take these away too! They're loaded, capped, and *not* on the half-cock! A jar, a fall, the slightest shock is enough to send them off!

'I'm dreadfully sorry that you should find it so uncomfortable in our house, Uncle Sylvester,' said Kitty, with a flushed cheek and vibrating voice.

'Oh, it's you—is it?' said Uncle Sylvester's voice, cheerfully. 'I thought it was Bridget out there. No, I don't intend to find it uncomfortable. That's why I'm putting these things outside. But, for Heaven's sake, don't *you* touch them. Leave that to the ineffable ass who put them there. Good-night!'

The door closed; the whispering voices of the girls faded from the corridor; the lights were lowered in the central hall, only the red Cyclopean eye of an enormous columnar stove, like a light-house, gleamed through the darkness. Outside, the silent night sparkled, glistened, and finally paled. Towards morning, having invested the sturdy wooden outer walls of the house and filmed with delicate tracery every available inch of window pane, it seemed stealthily to invade the house itself, stilling and chilling it as it drew closer around its central heart of warmth and life. Only once the frigid stillness was broken by the opening of a door and steps along the corridor. This was preceded by an acrid smell of burning bark.

It was subtle enough to permeate the upper floor and the bedroom of Marie du Page, who

was that night a light and nervous sleeper. Peering from her door, she could see, on the lower corridor, the extraordinary spectacle of Uncle Sylvester, robed in a gorgeous Japanese dressing-gown of quilted satin trimmed with the fur of the blue fox, candle in hand, leisurely examining the wall of the passage. Presently, drawing out a foot-rule from his pocket, he actually began to measure it! Miss Du Page saw no more. Hurriedly closing her door, she locked and bolted it, firmly convinced that Gabriel Lane was harbouring in the guise of Uncle Sylvester a somnambulist, a maniac, or an impostor.

PART II

'It doesn't seem as if Uncle Sylvester was any the more comfortable for having his own private bedding with him,' said Kitty Lane entering Marie's room early the next morning 'Bridget found him curled up in his furs like a ca asleep on the drawing-room sofa this morning.'

Marie started; she remembered her last night' vision. But some instinct—she knew not what—kept her from revealing it at this moment. Sh only said, a little ironically—

'Perhaps he missed the wild freedom of hi barbaric life in a small bed-room.'

'No. Bridget says he said something about being smoked out of his room by a ridiculous wood fire. The idea! As if a man brought up in the woods couldn't stand a little smoke. No—that's his excuse! Marie!—do you know what I firmly believe?'

'No,' said Marie, quickly.

'I firmly believe that poor man is ashamed of his past rough life, and does everything he can to forget it. That's why he affects those ultra-civilised and effeminate ways, and goes to the other extreme, as people always do.'

'Then you think he's really reformed, and isn't likely to take an impulse to rob and murder anybody again?'

'Why, Marie, what nonsense!'

Nevertheless, Uncle Sylvester appeared quite fresh and cheerful at breakfast. It seemed that he had lit the fire before undressing, but the green logs were piled so far into the room that the smoke nearly suffocated him. Fearful of alarming the house by letting the smoke escape through the door, he opened the window, and when it had partly dispersed, sought refuge himself from the arctic air of his bedroom in the drawing-room. So far the act did not seem inconsistent with his sanity, or even intelligence and consideration for others. But Marie

fixed upon him a pair of black, audacious eyes.

'Did you ever walk in your sleep, Mr. Lane?'

'No; but'—thoughtfully breaking an egg—'I have ridden, I think.'

'In your sleep? Oh, do tell us all about it?' said Cousins Jane and Emma in chorus.

Uncle Sylvester cast a resigned glance out of the window. 'Oh yes—certainly; it isn't much. You see at one time I was in the habit of making long monotonous journeys, and they were often exhausting, and,' he added, becoming wearied as if at the recollection, 'always dreadfully tiresome. As the trail was sometimes very uncertain and dangerous, I rode a very sure-footed mule that could go anywhere where there was space big enough to set her small hoofs upon. One night I was coming down the slope of a mountain towards a narrow valley and river that were crossed by an old, abandoned flume, of which nothing was now left but the upright trestle-work and long horizontal string-piece. As the trail was very difficult and the mule's pace was slow, I found myself dozing at times, and at last I must have fallen asleep. I think I must have been awakened by a singular regularity in the movement of the mule—or else it was the monotony of step that had put me to sleep and the cessation of it

awakened me. You see, at first I was not certain that I wasn't really dreaming. For the trail seemed to have disappeared; the wall of rock on one side had vanished also, and there appeared to be nothing ahead of me but the opposite hillside.'

Uncle Sylvester stopped to look out of the window at a passing carriage. Then he went on. 'The moon came out, and I saw what had happened. The mule, either of her own free will, or obeying some movement I had given the reins in my sleep, had swerved from the trail, got on top of the flume, and was actually walking across the valley on the narrow string-piece, a foot wide, half a mile long, and sixty feet from the ground. I knew,' he continued, examining his napkin thoughtfully, 'that she was perfectly surefooted, and that if I kept quiet she could make the passage, but I suddenly remembered that midway there was a break and gap of twenty feet in the continuous line, and that the string-piece was too narrow to allow her to turn round and retrace her steps.'

'Good Heavens!' said Cousin Jane.

'I beg your pardon?' said Uncle Sylvester, politely.

'I only said, "Good Heavens!" Well?' she added, impatiently.

'Well?' repeated Uncle Sylvester vaguely.

'Oh, that's all. I only wanted to explain what I meant by saying I had ridden in my sleep.'

'But,' said Cousin Jane, leaning across the table with grim deliberation and emphasising each word with the handle of her knife, 'how—did—you—and—that—mule get down?'

'Oh, with slings and ropes, you know—so,' demonstrating by placing his napkin-ring in a sling made of his napkin.

'And I suppose you carried the slings and ropes with you in your five trunks!' gasped Cousin Jane.

'No. Fellows on the river brought 'em in the morning. Mighty spry chaps, those river miners.'

'Very!' said Cousin Jane.

Breakfast over, they were not surprised that their sybaritic guest excused himself from an inspection of the town in the frigid morning air, and declined joining a skating party to the lake on the ground that he could keep warmer indoors with half the exertion. An hour later found him standing before the fire in Gabriel Lane's study, looking languidly down on his elder brother.

'Then, as far as I can see,' he said quietly, 'you have made ducks and drakes of your share of the property, and that virtually you are in the hands of this man Gunn and his father.'

'You're putting it too strongly,' said Gabriel, deprecatingly. 'In the first place, my investments with Gunn's firm are by no means failures, and they only hold as security a mortgage on the forest land below the hill. It's scarcely worth the money. I would have sold it long ago, but it had been a fancy of father's to keep it wild land for the sake of old times and the healthiness of the town.'

'There used to be a log cabin there, where the old man had a habit of camping out whenever he felt cramped by civilisation up here, wasn't there?' said Uncle Sylvester, meditatively.

'Yes,' said Gabriel, impatiently; 'it's still there—but to return to Mr. Gunn. He has taken a fancy to Kitty, and even if *I* could not lift the mortgage, there's some possibility that the land would still remain in the family.'

'I think I'll drive over this afternoon and take a look at the old shanty if this infernal weather lets up.'

'Yes; but just now, my dear Sylvester, let us attend to business. I want to show you those investments.'

'Oh, certainly; trot 'em out,' said his brother, plucking up a simulation of interest as he took a seat at the table.

From a drawer of his desk Gabriel brought

out a bundle of prospectuses and laid them before Uncle Sylvester.

A languid smile of recognition lit up the latter's face. 'Ah! yes,' he said, glancing at them. 'The old lot: "Carmelita," "Santa Maria," and "Preciosa!" Just as I imagined—and yet who'd have thought of seeing them *here*! A good deal rouged and powdered, Miss Carmelita, since I first knew you! Considerably bolstered up by miraculous testimony to your powers, my dear Santa Maria, since the day I found you out, to my cost! And you too, Preciosa!—a precious lot of money I dropped on you in the old days!'

'You are joking,' said Gabriel, with an uneasy smile. 'You don't mean to imply that this stock is old and worthless?'

'There isn't a capital in America or Europe where for the last five years it hasn't been floated with a new character each time. My dear Gabriel, that stock isn't worth the paper it is printed on.'

'But it is impossible that an experienced financier like Gunn could be deceived!'

'I'm sorry to hear *that*.'

'Come, Sylvester! confess you've taken a prejudice against Gunn from your sudden dislike of his son! And what have you against him?'

'I couldn't say exactly,' said Uncle Sylveste

reflectively. 'It may be his eyes, or only his cravat! But,' rising cheerfully and placing his hand lightly on his brother's shoulder, 'don't *you* worry yourself about that stock, old man; *I'll* see that somebody else has the worry and you the cash. And as to the land and—Kitty—well, you hold on to them both until you find out which the young man is really after.'

'And then?' said Gabriel, with a smile.

'Don't give him either! But, I say, haven't we had enough business this morning? Let's talk of something else. Who's the French girl?'

'Marie? She's the daughter of Jules du Page—don't you remember?—father's friend. When Jules died, it was always thought that father, who had half adopted her as a child, would leave her some legacy. But you know that father died without making a will, and that—rich as he was—his actual assets were far less than we had reason to expect. Kitty, who felt the disappointment as keenly as her friend, I believe would have divided her own share with her. It's odd, by the way, that father could have been so deceived in the amount of his capital, or how he got rid of his money in a way that we knew nothing of. Do you know, Sylvester, I've sometimes suspected——'

'What?' said Uncle Sylvester suddenly.

The bored languor of his face had abruptly vanished. Every muscle was alert; his grey eyes glittered.

'That he advanced money to Du Page, who lost it, or that they speculated together,' returned Gabriel, who, following Uncle Sylvester's voice only, had not noticed the change of expression.

'That would seem to be a weakness of the Lane family,' said Uncle Sylvester, grimly, with a return of his former carelessness. 'But that is not *your* own opinion—that's a suggestion of someone else?'

'Well,' said Gabriel, with a laugh and a slight addition of colour, 'it *was* Gunn's theory. As a man of the world and a practical financier, you know.'

'And you've talked with *him* about it?'

'Yes. It was a matter of general wonder years ago.'

'Very likely—but, just now, don't you think we've had enough financial talk?' said Uncle Sylvester, with a bored contraction of his eyebrows. 'Come,' looking around the room, 'you've changed the interior of the old house.'

'Yes. Unfortunately, just after father's death it was put in the hands of a local architect or builder, one of father's old friends, but not a very skilful workman, who made changes while the

family were away. That's why your present bedroom, which was father's old study, had a slice taken off it to make the corridor larger, and why the big chimney and hearthstone are still there, although the fireplace is modernised. That was Flint's stupidity.'

'Whose stupidity?' asked Uncle Sylvester, trimming his nails.

'Flint's—the old architect.'

'Why didn't you make him change it back again?'

'He left Lakeville shortly after, and I brought an architect from St. Louis after I returned from Europe. But nothing could be done to your room without taking down the chimney, so it remained as Flint left it.'

'That reminds me, Gabriel, I'm afraid I spoke rather cavalierly to Kitty, last night, about the arrangements of the room. The fact is, I've taken a fancy to it, and should like to fit it up myself. Have I your permission?'

'Certainly, my dear Sylvester.'

'I've some knick-knacks in my trunks, and I'll do it at once.'

'As you like.'

'And you'll see that I am not disturbed; and you'll explain it to Kitty, with my apologies.'

'Yes.'

'Then I'm off.'

Gabriel glanced at his brother with a perplexed smile. Here was the bored traveller, explorer, gold-seeker, soldier of fortune, actually as pleased as a girl over the prospect of arranging his room! He called after him: 'Sylvester!'

'Yes.'

'I say, if you could, you know, just try to interest these people to-night with some of your adventures—something told *seriously*, you know, as if you really were in earnest—I'd be awfully obliged to you. The fact is—you'll excuse me—but they think you don't come up to your reputation.'

'They want a story?'

'Yes—one of your experiences.'

'I'll give them one. Ta-ta!'

For the rest of the day Uncle Sylvester was invisible, although his active presence in his room was betrayed by the sound of hammering and moving of furniture. As the remainder of the party were skating on the lake, this eccentricity was not remarked except by one—Marie du Page—who on pretence of a slight cold had stayed at home. But with her suspicions of the former night, she had determined to watch the singular relative of her friend. Added to a natural loyalty to the Lanes, she was moved by a certain curiosity

and fascination towards this incomprehensible man.

The house was very quiet when she stole out of her room and passed softly along the corridor; she examined the wall carefully to discover anything that might have excited the visitor's attention. There were a few large engravings hanging there; could he have designed to replace them by some others? Suddenly she was struck with the distinct conviction that the wall of the corridor did not coincide with the wall of his room as represented by the line of the door. There was certainly a space between the two walls unaccounted for. This was undoubtedly what had attracted *his* attention; but what *business* was it of his?

She reflected that she had seen in the wall of the conservatory an old closed staircase, now used as shelves for dried herbs and seeds, which she had been told was the old-time communication between the garden and Grandfather Lane's study—the room now occupied by the stranger. Perhaps it led still further, and thus accounted for the space. Determined to satisfy herself, she noiselessly descended to the conservatory. There, surely, was the staircase—a narrow flight of wooden steps encumbered with packages of herbs—losing itself in upper darkness. By the aid of

a candle she managed to grope and pick her way up step by step. Then she paused. The staircase had abruptly ended on the level of the study, now cut off from it by the new partition. She was in a stifling enclosure, formed by the walls, scarcely eighteen inches wide. It was made narrower by a singular excrescence on the old wall, which seemed to have been a bricked closet, now half destroyed and in ruins. She turned to descend, when a strange sound from Uncle Sylvester's room struck her ear. It was the sound of tapping on the floor close to the partition, within a foot of where she was standing. At the same moment there was a decided movement of the plank of the flooring beneath the partition: it began to slide slowly, and then was gradually withdrawn into the room. With prompt presence of mind, she instantly extinguished her candle and drew herself breathlessly against the partition.

When the plank was entirely withdrawn, a ray of light slipped through the opening, revealing the bare rafters of the floor, and a hand and arm inserted under the partition, groping as if towards the bricked closet. As the fingers of the exploring hand were widely extended, Marie had no difficulty in recognising on one of them a peculiar signet ring which Uncle Sylvester wore. A swift impulse seized her. To the audacious

Marie impulse and action were the same thing. Bending stealthily over the aperture, she suddenly snatched the ring from the extended finger. The hand was quickly withdrawn with a start and uncontrolled exclamation, and she availed herself of that instant to glide rapidly down the stairs.

She regained her room stealthily, having the satisfaction a moment later of hearing Uncle Sylvester's door open and the sound of his footsteps in the corridor. But he was evidently unable to discover any outer ingress to the enclosure, or believed the loss of his ring an accident, for he presently returned. Meantime, what was she to do? Tell Kitty of her discovery, and show the ring? No—not yet! Oddly enough, now that she had the ring, taken from his wicked finger in the very act, she found it as difficult as ever to believe in his burglarious design. She must wait. The mischief—if there had been mischief—was done; the breaking in of the bricked closet was, from the appearance of the ruins, a bygone act. Could it have been some youthful escapade of Uncle Sylvester's, the scene of which he was revisiting as criminals are compelled to do? And had there been anything taken from the closet—or was its destruction a part of the changes in the old house? How could she find out without asking Kitty? There was one way. She

remembered that Mr. Gunn had once shown a great deal of interest to Kitty about the old homestead, and even of old Mr. Lane's woodland cabin. She would ask *him*. It was a friendly act, for Kitty had not of late been very kind to him.

The opportunity presented itself at dusk, as Mr. Gunn, somewhat abstracted, stood apart at the drawing-room window. Marie hoped he had enjoyed himself while skating; her stupid cold had kept her indoors. She had amused herself rambling about the old homestead; it was such a queer place, so full of old nooks and corners and unaccountable spaces. Just the place, she would think, where old treasures might have been stored. Eh?

Mr. Gunn had not spoken—he had only coughed. But in the darkness his eyes were fixed angrily on her face. Without observing it, she went on. She knew he was interested in the old house; she had heard him talk to Kitty about it: had Kitty ever said anything about some old secret hoarding place?

No, certainly not! And she was mistaken, he never was interested in the house! He could not understand what had put that idea in her head Unless it was this ridiculous, shady stranger in the guise of an uncle whom they had got there It was like his affectation!

'Oh, dear, no,' said Marie, with unmistakable truthfulness, '*he* did not say anything. But,' with sudden inconsistent aggression, 'is *that* the way you speak to Kitty of her uncle?'

Really he didn't know—he was joking only; and he was afraid he must just now ask her to excuse him. He had received letters that made it possible that he might be called suddenly to New York at any moment. Marie stared. It was evident that he had proposed to Kitty and been rejected! But she was no nearer her discovery.

Nor was there the least revelation in the calm, half-bored, yet good-humoured presence of the wicked uncle at dinner. So indifferent did he seem, not only to his own villainy but even to the loss it had entailed, that she had a wild impulse to take the ring from her pocket and display it on her own finger before him then and there. But the conviction that he would in some way be equal to the occasion prevented her. The dinner passed off with some constraint, no doubt emanating from the conscious Kitty and Gunn. Nevertheless, when they had returned to the drawing-room, Gabriel rubbed his hands expectantly.

'I prevailed on Sylvester this morning to promise to tell us some of his experiences—something *complete* and satisfactory this time. Eh?'

Uncle Sylvester, warming his cold blood before the fire, looked momentarily forgetful and —disappointing. Cousins Jane and Emma shrugged their shoulders.

'Eh,' said Uncle Sylvester, absently, 'er—er —Oh, yes! Well' (more cheerfully), 'about what, eh?'

'Let it be,' said Marie, pointedly, fixing her black magnetic eyes on the wicked stranger, 'let it be something about the *discovery* of gold, or a buried *treasure hoard*, or a robbery.'

To her intense disgust Uncle Sylvester, far from being discomfited or confused, actually looked pleased, and his grey eyes thawed slightly.

'Certainly,' he said. 'Well, then! Down on the San Joaquin River there was an old chap—one of the earliest settlers—in fact he'd come on from Oregon before the gold discovery. His name, dear me!'—continued Uncle Sylvester, with an effort of memory and apparently beginning already to lose his interest in the story —'was—er—Flint.'

As Uncle Sylvester paused here, Cousin Jane broke in impatiently. 'Well, that's not an uncommon name. There was an old carpenter here in your father's time who was called Flint.

'Yes,' said Uncle Sylvester, languidly. 'But there is, or was, something uncommon about it—

and that's the point of the story, for in the old time Flint and Gunn were of the same stock.'

'Is this a Californian joke?' said Gunn, with a forced smile on his flushed face. 'If so, spare me, for it's an old one.'

'It's much older *history*, Mr. Gunn,' said Uncle Sylvester blandly, 'which I remember from a boy. When the first Flint traded near Sault Sainte Marie, the Canadian *voyageurs* literally translated his name into Pierre à Fusil, and he went by that name always. But when the English superseded the French in numbers and language the name was literally translated back again into "Peter Gunn," which his descendants bear.'

'A laboured form of the old joke,' said Gunn, turning contemptuously away.

'But the story,' said Cousins Jane and Emma. 'The story of the gold discovery—never mind the names.'

'Excuse me,' said Uncle Sylvester, placing his hand in the breast of his coat with a delightful exaggeration of offended dignity. 'But, doubts having been cast upon my preliminary statement, I fear I must decline proceeding further.' Nevertheless, he smiled unblushingly at Miss Du Page as he followed Gunn from the room.

The next morning those who had noticed the strained relations of Miss Kitty and Mr. Gunn

were not suprised that the latter was recalled on pressing business to New York by the first train; but it was a matter of some astonishment to Gabriel Lane and Marie du Page that Uncle Sylvester should have been up early, and actually accompanied that gentleman as far as the station! Indeed, the languid explorer and gold-seeker exhibited remarkable activity, and, clad in a rough tourist suit, announced, over the breakfast-table, his intention of taking a long tramp through the woods, which he had not revisited since a boy. To this end he had even provided himself with a small knapsack, and for once realised Kitty's ideal of his character.

'Don't go too far,' said Gabriel, 'for, although the cold has moderated, the barometer is falling fast, and there is every appearance of snow. Take care you are not caught in one of our blizzards.'

'But *you* are all going on the lake to skate!' protested Uncle Sylvester.

'Yes; for the very reason that it may be our last chance; but should it snow we shall be nearer home than you may be.'

Nevertheless, when it came on to snow, as Gabriel had predicted, the skating party was by no means so near home as he had imagined. A shrewd keenness and some stimulating electric condition of the atmosphere had tempted the young

people far out on the lake, and they had ignored the first fall of fine greyish granulations that swept along the icy surface like little puffs of dust or smoke. Then the fall grew thicker, the grey sky contracted, the hurrying flakes, dashed against them by a fierce north-wester, were larger, heavier, and seemed an almost palpable force that held them back. Their skates, already clogged with drift, were beginning to be useless. The bare wind-swept spaces were becoming rarer; they could only stumble on blindly towards the nearest shore. Nor when they reached it were they yet safe; they could scarcely stand against the still increasing storm that was fast obliterating the banks and stretch of meadow beyond. Their only hope of shelter was the range of woods that joined the hill. Holding hands in single file, the little party, consisting of Kitty, Marie, and Cousins Jane and Emma—stout-hearted Gabriel leading and Cousin John bringing up the rear—at last succeeded in reaching it, and were rejoiced to find themselves near old Lane's half-ruined cabin. To their added joy and astonishment, whiffs of whirling smoke were issuing from the crumbling chimney. They ran to the crazy door, pushed aside its weak fastening, and found—Uncle Sylvester calmly enjoying a pipe before a blazing fire. A small pickaxe and crow-bar were lying upon a mound of freshly-turned

earth beside the chimney, where the rotten flooring had been torn up.

The tumultuous entrance of the skating party required no explanation; but when congratulations had been exchanged, the wet snow shaken off, and they had drawn round the fire, curious eyes were cast upon the solitary occupant and the pile of earth and *débris* before him.

'I believe,' said Gabriel, laughingly, 'that you have been so bored here that you have actually played at gold-hunting for amusement.'

Uncle Sylvester took the pipe from his mouth and nodded.

'It's a common diversion of yours,' said Marie audaciously.

Uncle Sylvester smiled sweetly.

'And have you been successful *this time*?' asked Marie.

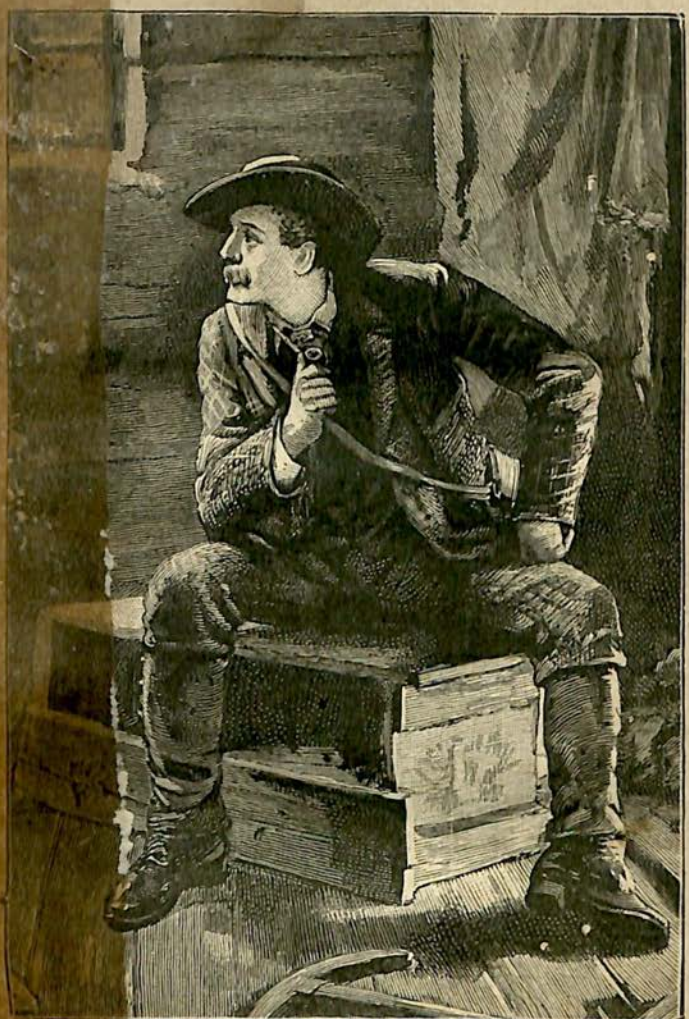
'I got the colour.'

'Eh?'

Uncle Sylvester rose and placed himself with his back to the fire, gently surveying the assembled group.

'I was interrupted in a story of gold-digging last evening,' he said blandly. 'How far had I got?'

'You were down on the San Joaquin River in the spring of '50, with a chap named



UNCLE SYLVESTER TOOK THE PIPE FROM HIS MOUTH

Flint,' chorused Cousins Jane and Emma, promptly.

'Ah! yes,' said Uncle Sylvester. Well, in those days there was a scarcity of money in the diggings. Gold dust there was in plenty, but no *coin*. You can fancy it was a bother to weigh out a pinch of dust every time you wanted a drink of whisky or a pound of flour; but there was no other legal tender. Pretty soon, however, a lot of gold and silver pieces found their way into circulation in our camp and the camps around us. They were foreign—old French and English coins. Here's one of them that I kept.' He took from his pocket a gold coin and handed it to Gabriel.

Lane rose to his feet with an exclamation 'Why, this is like the louis-d'or that grandfather saved through the war and gave to father.'

Uncle Sylvester took the coin back, placed it in his left eye, like a monocle, and winked gravely at the company.

'It is the *same*!' he went on quietly. 'I was interested, for I had a good memory, and I remembered that, as a boy, grandfather had shown me one of those coins and told me he was keeping them for old Jules du Page, who didn't believe in banks and bank-notes. Well, I traced them to a trader called Flint, who was shipping gold dust from Stockton to Peter Gunn & Sons, in New York.'

'To whom?' asked Gabriel, quickly.

'Old Gunn—the father of your friend!' said Uncle Sylvester, blandly. 'We talked the matter over on our way to the station this morning. Well, to return. Flint only said that he had got them from a man called Thompson, who had got them from somebody else in exchange for goods. A year or two afterwards this same Thompson happened to be frozen up with me in Starvation Camp. When he thought he was dying he confessed that he had been bribed by Flint to say what he had said, but that he believed the coins were stolen. Meantime, Flint had disappeared. Other things claimed my attention. I had quite forgotten him, until one night, five years afterwards, I blundered into a deserted mining camp, by falling asleep on my mule, who carried me across a broken flume, but—I think I told you that story already.'

'You never finished it,' said Cousin Jane sharply.

'Let me do so now, then. I was really saved by some Indians, who took me for a spirit up aloft there in the moonlight and spread the alarm. The first white man they brought me was a wretched drunkard known to the boys as "Old Fusil," or "Fusel Oil," who went into delirium tremens at the sight of me. Well, who do you suppose he turned out to be? Flint! Flint

played out and ruined! Cast off and discarded by his relations in New York—the foundation of whose fortunes he had laid by the villainy they had accepted and condoned. For Flint, as the carpenter of the old homestead, had discovered the existence of a bricked closet in the wall of father's study, partitioned it off so that he could break into it without detection and rifle it at his leisure, and who had thus carried off that part of grandfather's hoard which father had concealed there. He knew it could never be missed by the descendants. But, through haste or ignorance, he *did not touch the papers* and documents also hidden there. And *they* told of the existence of grandfather's second *cache*, or hiding-place, beneath this hearth, and were left for me to discover.'

He coolly relit his pipe, fixed his eyes on Marie without apparently paying attention to the breathless scrutiny of the others, and went on: 'Flint, *alias* Pierre à Fusil, *alias* Gunn, died a maniac. I resolved to test the truth of his story. I came here. I knew the old homestead, as a boy who had wandered over every part of it, far better than you, Gabriel, or anyone. The elder Gunn had only heard of it through the criminal disclosure of his relative, and only wished to absorb it through his son in time, and thus obliterate all trace of Flint's outrage. I recognised

the room perfectly—thanks to our dear Kitty, who had taken up the carpet—which thus disclosed the loose plank before the closet that was hidden by the partition. Under pretext of re-arranging the room—for which Kitty will forgive me—I spent the day behind a locked door, making my way through the partition. There I found the rifled closet, but the papers intact. They contained a full description of the sum taken by Flint, but also of a larger sum buried in a cask beside this chimney. I had just finished unearthing it a few moments before you came. I had at first hoped to offer it to the family as a Christmas gift to-morrow, but——' He stopped and sucked slowly at his pipe.

'We anticipated you,' said Gabriel laughing.

'No,' said Uncle Sylvester coolly. 'But because it don't happen to belong to *you* at all! According to the paper I have in my pocket, which is about as legal a document as I ever saw, it is father's free gift to Miss Marie du Page.'

Kitty threw her arms around her white and breathless friend with a joyful cry, and honest Gabriel's face shone with unselfish gratification.

'For yourself, my dear Gabriel, you must be satisfied with the fact that Messrs. Peter Gunn & Sons will take back your wild-cat stock at the price you paid for it. It is the price they pay

for their share in this little transaction, as I had the honour of pointing out to Mr. Gunn on our way to the station this morning.'

'Then you think that young Mr. Gunn knew that Flint was his relation, and that he had stolen father's money,' said Kitty, 'and that Mr. Gunn only wanted to——' She stopped, with flashing eyes.

'I think he would have liked to have made an arrangement, my dear, that would keep the secret and the property in the family,' said Uncle Sylvester. 'But I don't think he suspected the existence of the second treasure here.'

'And then, sir,' said Cousin Jane, 'it appears that all these wretched, unsatisfactory scraps of stories you were telling us were nothing after all but——'

'My way of telling *this* one,' said Uncle Sylvester.

As the others were eagerly gathering around the unearthed treasure, Marie approached him timidly, all her audacity gone, tears in her eyes, and his ring held hesitatingly between her fingers. 'How can I thank you—and how *can* you ever forgive me?'

'Well,' said Uncle Sylvester, gazing at her critically, 'you might keep the ring to think over it

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